

JEEVADHARA

Property of
Graduate Theological Union

DEC 13 1990

CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

ECCLESIOLOGIES IN DIALOGUE

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE
MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH

K. M. George

MAR THOMA CHURCH:
ORIGIN, GROWTH AND ECUMENICAL INVOLVEMENT

M. V. Abraham

THE CHURCH OF NORTH INDIA:
ITS HISTORY, VISION AND LIFE

Pritam B. Santram

THE METHODIST CHURCH IN INDIA:
SOME ECCLESIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

David C. Scott

PENTECOSTAL ECCLESIOLOGY:
PROMISES AND PROBLEMS

P.B. Thomas

BOOK REVIEWS

July 1990

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

GENERAL EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

SECTION EDITORS

The Human Problem

Felix Wilfred

C. Thomas Abraham

The Word of God

Paul Kalluveettil

George Kaniarakam

The Living Christ

Samuel Rayan

Cherian Menachery

The People of God

Kuncheria Pathil

George Karakunnel

The Meeting of Religions

John B. Chethimattam

John Peter Muringathery

The Fulness of Life

Felix Podimattam

Mathew Paikada

Literary Editor: Philips Vadakekalam

SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

Mathias Mundadan

Kurien Kunnumpuram

Felix Wilfred

K. M George

Dominic Veliath

George Karakunnel

Geevarghese Chediath

EDITOR - BOOK REVIEW

J. B. Chethimattam

JEEVADHARA

The People of God

ECCLESIOLOGIES IN DIALOGUE

Editor:
KUNCHERIA PATHIL

Jeevadhara
Kottayam - 686 017
Kerala, India
Tel. (0091) 481. 7430

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	251
Some Aspects of the Ecclesiology of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church	255
<i>K. M. George</i>	
Mar Thoma Church: Origin, Growth and Ecumenical Involvement	265
<i>M. V. Abraham</i>	
The Church of North India: Its History, Vision and Life	275
<i>Pritam B. Santram</i>	
Pentecostal Ecclesiology: Promises and Problems	286
<i>P.B. Thomas</i>	
The Methodist Church in India: Some Ecclesiological Challenges	302
<i>David C. Scott</i>	
Book Reviews	329
<i>J. B. Chethimattam</i>	

Editorial

The Ecumenical Movement of the twentieth century is a significant phenomenon in the history of Christianity. Though the search for the lost Christian unity was never lacking in the Church, it took a systematic and organized form only in the contemporary ecumenical movement. In it the different Churches could rediscover their common faith and arrive at a large measure of convergence on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. More significant is the mutual discovery and recognition of the individual heritage of the different Churches by which the Catholicity or wholeness of the Universal Church has become more visible and tangible as a fellowship of the different individual Churches.

The concern for the unity of the Church means the commitment to the wholeness of the Church. Ecclesiology thus seems to be the crucial issue and the heart of the matter. The search and research in the ecumenical movement, especially in the "Faith and Order" for the last 80 years has finally led us to a frank and serious discussion on the ecclesiology of the different Churches. *Jeevadhara* would like to participate in and contribute to this ecumenical discussion on ecclesiology. In the last July Number (1989) we started this discussion by inviting theologians of three Churches — Catholic, Church of South India (CSI) and Lutheran — to expose the ecclesiology of their Churches and the challenges they face today in the context of their ecumenical experience. The present Number continues the discussion by representative theologians from five Churches, viz. Malankara Orthodox Syrian, Mar Thoma, North Indian (CNI), Pentecostal and Methodist.

K. M. George representing the Indian Orthodox Church or the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church discusses the eccle-

siological traits of that Church, of which the most significant is its Indian and Apostolic character. The criteria for the Orthodoxy of faith, the structures of the Church, the concept and practice of mission, the concept of Apostolic succession etc. as developed within the boundaries of the ancient Roman empire cannot be normative for all other Churches. Every genuine local Church is fully the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Any attempt to bring it under the jurisdiction of another local Church under the pretext of Roman Primacy is strongly questioned by the author.

The Mar Thoma Church came into existence in the early 19th century as the result of a division within the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church occasioned by a reform in the Church led by the CMS missionaries of the Anglican Church. M. V. Abraham outlines here the ethos and characteristics of his Church as a unique synthesis of the Eastern and Western ecclesiology, Eastern in liturgy, ecclesial structures and practices and Western in Biblical studies, theological explorations and missionary outreach. The Mar Thoma Church is a pioneer in the ecumenical movement both in India and on the international scene, and has been fully involved in the social and political life of the country. The Church exhibits a wide spectrum of theological thinking from strict orthodoxy to Pentecostal ecclesiological thinking, and this large theological freedom and doctrinal diversity is both its strength and weakness.

Pritam B. Santram, the Delhi Bishop of the Church of North India (CNI) introduces our readers into the history, life and vision of his Church which came into existence in 1970 out of a union of seven Protestant denominations — Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Disciples and Brethren. It is a "unity in diversity", and the Church has grown today stronger and maturer in its unity, witness and service. A readiness to break with the petrified historical forms, structures and doctrines of the Churches, democracy and full involvement of the laity in the Church's life and work and admission of women to the ordained ministry are some of its outstanding characteristics. But the young Church faces serious problems too — the ailments of democracy,

groupism, vested interest in property and positions and consequent litigations.

The Methodist Church in India (MCI), established here in the middle of the 19th century is an offshoot of the Methodist Episcopal Church of U.S.A. John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist Movement, a revivalist and missionary movement in the Anglican Church of England at the end of the 18th century. It was an attempt to rediscover and renew part of the ancient Christian heritage lost in the Anglican Church, such as, emphasis on Christian spiritual and moral perfection or holiness, agape meal in connection with the Eucharist and real fellowship, spontaneous prayers and disciplined ascetical life. The Methodist movement and association later on became a separate denomination and spread all over the world due to their intense missionary activity. David C. Scott of the MCI makes our readers familiar with the Methodist ecclesial heritage and its present needs and challenges.

The Pentecostal Churches though born only in the 20th century, has already become the largest among the Protestant Churches today and the fastest growing Church, and are seen by many Churches as a threat but by others as a promise and hope. P. B. Thomas, a young theologian of the Pentecostal Churches writes herein on the Pentecostal ecclesiology. The Pentecostal movement was a protest and reaction against the highly institutionalized and sophisticated historical Churches and a summons to return to the simplicity and Pentecostal spirit of the early Church with the emphasis on adult Baptism in the Holy Spirit, born-again experience, gift of tongues and other gifts of the Holy Spirit, faith-healing, unstructured and spontaneous liturgies and prayers etc. They strongly advocate the full autonomy of the local congregation, and believe that all organizations beyond the local are unscriptural and therefore unnecessary. So naturally they are antagonistic to the Catholic Church and other highly organized Churches and to the World Council of Churches. What is required today on the part of the other Churches is a readiness and willingness to recognize and appreciate the witness of the Pentecostal Churches, and on the part of the latter an openness for dialogue with the other ecclesial traditions and involvement in the ecumenical movement.

The objective of this ecclesiological dialogue should not be misunderstood. What we need today is not a uniform and standardized ecclesiology to be accepted by all the Churches. Rather, the variety, individuality, richness and beauty of the ecclesiologies of the different Churches are to be recognized, welcomed and appreciated, of course, not without open and critical exchange. In this dialogue, we hope, some ecclesiological convergence may arise by which we will be able to rediscover our "unity in diversity" in the One Church of Jesus Christ.

Dharmaram College
Bangalore

Kuncheria Pathil

Some Aspects of the Ecclesiology of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

It would be rather utopian to think about shaping an ecumenical ecclesiology for India without coming to grips with our historical experience with the church traditions outside India, which had positive or negative impacts on the Indian Church.

This paper merely indicates some of the ecclesiological principles developed by the Indian Orthodox Church in the course of its history and in the context of its encounter with alien ecclesiastical and political authority. This is not to repeat the doctrinal position of the church but to point out the ecumenical possibilities for a truly united future Indian Church.

Some of the statements may be controversial, even "un-charitable". They simply reflect the pain of division inflicted on the one Indian Church by Christians who came from outside and they are not really meant to be uncharitable.

The ecclesiological position of the Malankara Orthodox Church has three major formative components:

- a. The church's deep awareness of being an Indian Church tracing its origin and apostolic character to the work of St. Thomas, the founding father of the Indian Church.
- b. The liturgical, theological and spiritual heritage of the Syrian tradition — East Syrian in the pre-Portuguese period and West Syrian in the post-Portuguese period, precisely since 1665.
- c. The challenge of the ecumenical movement in the 20th century bringing the church into contact with other Eastern Orthodox traditions as well as with Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions.

Indian and Apostolic

What were the major constitutive elements of the self-awareness of the church in Malankara in the period between the beginning and the arrival of colonial christianity through the Portuguese? It is extremely difficult to shape a clear image of the church during this period because of the very scanty material available to us. Historians have tried to interpret this period according to their confessional convictions and cultural bias. We can, however, point out at least two elements which may be commonly accepted without much controversy and which have implications for a future-oriented ecumenical vision of the Indian Church.

First, the underlying assumption of the life of the Church in India was that it was an indigenous church rooted in the social and cultural milieu of the country. Perhaps, the question whether the church was indigenous or foreign was never consciously asked as we do today with all our sub-conscious sense of guilt and shame of betraying our tradition and slavishly submitting ourselves to the conquering christianity of the European colonial masters. Church historians who use the Western concept of "mission" as the decisive criterion of the life of the church have often told us that the church in India became a "fifth caste" and ignored its vocation to preach the Gospel and convert the Indian masses to the Christian faith. This is a retrospective judgement made largely from the context of the aggressive missionary expansion of the Western tradition - both Roman Catholic and Protestant and the quantitative church growth that resulted from the colonial missionary enterprise.

This, again, is an easy judgement, while it would be rather difficult to assess the positive value of the ancient church's unassuming rootedness in this culture in terms of her witness to the gospel. Most historians have been either reluctant or unable to go deep into this because of their predominant notion of "mission" as "conversion" by any means and the growth of the church as the geographical and quantitative visibility of great numbers. Whether this essentially expansionist notion, developed in the West, belongs to the heart of the gospel of Christ is a different question. We will not miss the

mark if we affirm that the Indian Church in the pre-Portuguese period had the confidence of being well integrated in this culture. It would be futile to look for documentary evidence to prove this affirmation. On the contrary it may be worthwhile to identify small pockets of christianity in some parts of Kerala, which are rather uncontaminated by western missions and which can give us a glimpse of the life style, faith convictions and cultural perceptions of the christian community as it lived many centuries in India before the arrival of the Portuguese Roman Catholics.

Secondly, the apostolic connection of the origin of their christian faith is an integral part of the conviction and awareness of ancient Indian christians. They are quite aware that the faith they hold belongs to a rich and ancient tradition and had been handed down from the Messiah himself. In the symbol of St. Thomas, they celebrate this unbroken tradition of faith. There seems to be no evidence to show that the holding of this faith by christians resulted in any major conflict with the non-christian society in which they lived. It may be true that they never deliberately reflected on the social and cultural implications of their christian faith as many christian churches and groups do today.

It may not be helpful to judge the faith content of the early Indian christians on the basis of the norms of orthodoxy and heresy developed within the borders of the ancient Roman empire. Most of the theological controversies about which we read in the Fathers of the church and which are alluded to in liturgical and catechetical works took place within the confines of ancient Roman and Byzantine empires. They carry the imprints of imperial interventions. The Western Church took over from the empire and translated the imperial pretensions to ecclesiastical structures and language.

The ancient Indian Church, spiritually related to the church in Persia, always remained outside the imperial ecclesiastical climate of the West. Although, later on, with the arrival of the colonial christianity, christians in India began to be divided and groups of christians started to declare allegiance to various western church traditions, the pre-Portuguese Church

in India remained eastern in character and cherished the apostolic tradition in the unity of faith.

In the West, the terms apostolic tradition and apostolic succession were very often associated with the special theological claims of the Roman Church. These claims, totally rejected by all non-Roman Eastern churches as having no theological value, but only political ground, never disturbed the Indian church's sense of the apostolic tradition until the coming of the Portuguese Roman Catholics. For the Indian Church, apostolicity was never primarily a question of authority or jurisdiction, but the tradition of faith in Christ as witnessed to by the apostolic community and made known to them by St. Thomas, the apostle of Christ, and continued in the one undivided church. Fortunately, in the absence of any royal patronage or imperial context, the Indian Christians never developed any absolutist claims of primacy or of universal jurisdiction on the basis of their apostolic tradition.

These two elements — Indian and apostolic — are mentioned here not simply as the hallmarks of the undivided Indian Church in the past, but also as a future common ground and convergence point for our different ecclesiologies. The Orthodox Church in India is deeply aware of these twin-elements as constitutive of its ecclesiology and would wish that these elements emerge as a focal point for an undivided ecumenical church in India.

The Liturgical — Theological Factor

The Syrian liturgical and theological tradition has enormously influenced the ecclesiological understanding of the Indian Orthodox Church. The church came into contact with the West Syrian tradition of Antioch in 1665, following a period of persecution and enforced proselytism by the Portuguese Roman Catholics. The inquisitional measures of the Portuguese colonial authorities succeeded in breaking the church's relationship with the East Syrian Church. Although the church was taken by force in the infamous synod of Diamper to subject herself to Roman ecclesiastical authority, after half a century, the "Oath of Coonan Cross" marked the church's radical protest against Roman and Portuguese authority and liberated a section of the church from alien ecclesiastical domination. 'The Coonan

Cross" revolt can be justifiably qualified as the first organised Indian resistance to a foreign colonial power. Roman Catholic historians who have always tried to blunt the sharp edges of the series of events which took place in the Indian Church following Portuguese occupation, may not be unaware of the deep and unforgettable wounds this period has inflicted on that section of the church which proudly and courageously fought an aggressive foreign ecclesiastical and political power in order to protect their own independent Eastern Christian heritage. Since history is always made from the side of the powerful and the victorious, this chapter in the church's history is also often presented in a totally distorted form. The recurrent memory of this period sharpens the present ecclesiological position of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Ecclesiologically, the Orthodox Church in India takes a position which is almost common to all the Eastern Orthodox churches.

The pivotal point of this position is the church as the Body of Christ centred around the Holy Eucharist. Contemporary Orthodox theologians often speak about the 'eucharistic ecclesiology'. The eucharistic synaxis, the gathering of the community around the mystery of our faith celebrated in the liturgy becomes normative for the life of the church in all its aspects.

First of all, the fullness of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church is manifested in every genuine local eucharistic assembly. This assembly assumes that it meets in love and in the Orthodox (= true) faith, in communion with the bishop who is the symbol of unity of the church. This local church is not "a part" of the whole, the so-called "universal church". The local church manifests the fullness of the church. The Orthodox Church seldom employs the term "universal church". The expression has been used in the Western Roman Catholic tradition in a way totally unacceptable to the Eastern churches. In the Orthodox Church, there is a deep concern for the catholicity or plenitude of the church. But this is never translated into a universalist notion of the church with all its attendant notions like, for example, universal pastor, universal jurisdiction, universal ministry etc. Every genuine local eucharistic community can be qualified by the classical attributes of one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

Secondly, we may at times need a visible expression of the unity of all the local churches though it is always assumed in every local church. Then the churches resort to 'ecumenical councils' as a visible expression of unity. But it should be remembered that the Eastern Churches lived many centuries now without meeting in an ecumenical council. The Oriental Orthodox Churches (Egypt, Syria, Armenia, India, Ethiopia) maintained one faith and one communion for the last 15 centuries without coming together in an ecumenical council. That means an ecumenical council is not a *sine qua non* condition or regular feature of the life of the churches, though it might help the pastoral, theological and spiritual life of the church.

Thirdly, the principle of conciliarity is inbuilt into the Orthodox understanding of the church. This is underlying every aspect of the life of the church even if no ecumenical council takes place for many centuries. Consensus in faith and love is achieved through the essentially similar practice of liturgy, spirituality and church discipline in every local church. The general theological and spiritual ethos is the same in every local Orthodox Church. Conciliarity practised at the local level is an expression of the conciliar character which is constitutive of the Body of Christ in its totality. It should be remembered that even an ecumenical council has authority only when it is received by the people, the Body of Christ. Many people have the impression that the authority of an ecumenical council in the Eastern tradition is equivalent to Papal authority in the Roman Catholic Church. This is not simply true. The council and its decisions are subject to reception by the whole church.

Fourthly, ecclesiastical hierarchy is not over and above the people of God, but is within the Body of Christ and receives its authority from the community of faith. This principle is jealously guarded in all the Eastern Churches. It is clearly visible, for example, in the election of a bishop in the Indian Orthodox Church. It is a representative body of the whole church, two-third of which is constituted by elected lay people from each parish which elects a bishop. This body includes all the bishops and representatives of clergy and a majority of lay people, and thus has synodal character manifesting the conciliarity and consensus of the whole church. The collegiate epis-

copate is modelled on the collegial character of the apostolic community. No one bishop has authority in an isolated manner. Every bishop exercises his apostolic authority in communion with the college of bishops and with the community of clergy and the faithful. Presiding positions like that of Patriarch or Catholicos are exercised with the common consent of the church, and within the collegiate authority of the episcopate and never above it.

Fifthly, every local Orthodox Church is committed to the principle of 'autocephaly', literally, rule by its own head. But it means more than self-rule. Originally it meant freedom from alien ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It also implies the overall life and witness of the local church taking into account its own cultural, social and political context. In other words, autocephaly means the authentic presence of the church of Christ in every particular place and time.

In the life of the Orthodox Church in India this principle is consistently maintained. In the present situation of division and litigation what is really at stake is this principle. Unfortunately some of the hierarchs in the syrian tradition are fascinated by absolutist models of authority and jurisdiction successfully experimented elsewhere and try to imitate those models without proper respect for the venerable orthodox tradition of autocephaly. This is at the root of the present conflict. The Indian Church evoked the name of St. Thomas throughout its history, not simply to show its ancient apostolic character, but also to manifest its freedom in Christ to become a true Indian Church rooted in this soil and culture. The winds of history always turned against it since the 16th century imposing alien rule and enforced structures of authority unfamiliar to the spirit of eastern christianity. Unfortunately one section of the Indian Church always stood with the overlording foreigner, supporting his unchristian and arrogant claims and looking down upon our own authentic Indian and eastern tradition.

Only a few of the ecclesiological principles are mentioned above. They belong not only to the fundamental understanding of the present day Orthodox Churches, but also to the tradition of the undivided church. As such, they have relevance

for a future ecumenical church. The Orthodox are sometimes told by their more successful western brothers that the orthodox ecclesiology is not practical or efficient enough to build a powerful, highly organised christianity. It may be true, especially for those who are deeply nostalgic about past christian empires and a great universal Christendom. But the Orthodox are convinced that the ecclesiology of the eastern tradition corresponds to Christian principles embodied in the wisdom of the undivided church.

Ecumenical contacts and context

The Malankara Orthodox Church entered very early into the ecumenical movement as it was one of the founding members of the World Council of Churches started in 1948. The ecumenical contact has become fruitful as it also opened the church to the more positive aspects of the western tradition, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. This was important for the Malankara Orthodox Church since at home it had been continuously subject to the negative impact and domination of western traditions.

Ecclesiologically, the church does not feel the need of altering any of its fundamental convictions. The ecumenical discussions have proved that most Protestant churches have neither great interest nor a clear position with regard to ecclesiology. Most of these churches are not concerned about raising fundamental ecclesiological questions, beyond the church's practical mission understood in more or less classical Western ways. It is commonly acknowledged that the future of the ecumenical movement depends to a great extent on our ecclesiological consensus. Yet, the interest in this issue is not correspondingly high. There has been a remarkable consensus about the studies on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry initiated by the Faith and Order commission of the WCC. But the crucial issues like the nature of the church, the meaning of ministry etc. remain unsettled.

Relationship with the Roman Catholic Church has not always been easy partly because of the bitter historical experience retained in the collective memory of the Malankara Orthodox church since the 16th century, and partly because of the

consistently uniatist approach of the Roman Catholic Church. The uniatist approach, which the great Church of Rome maintains vis-à-vis all the eastern churches, consists in unilaterally assimilating the Orthodox churches, along with the riches of their liturgical and spiritual tradition, into the universal Roman Catholic Church and the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome. Like all other eastern churches, the Indian Church has been until today a victim of this approach, often realized through dubious means. The policy of the 16th century followed in the creation of the Malankara Catholic rite about half a century ago continues and still creates painful tensions between the small Orthodox Church in India and the great universal church of Rome. It seems, no Indian Roman Catholic theologian or historian has so far sympathetically examined why the Orthodox churches resist so vehemently the uniatist approach of Rome. Some of the Indian Catholic theologians who are really committed to creating a true Indian Catholic rite can bring real help to both our churches if they initiate an objective study of the question.

In accordance with the eucharistic ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church and other venerable principles of the undivided church, the Orthodox churches reject the ecclesiological claims of the Bishop of Rome. According to a certain tradition developed within the Roman empire, the Bishop of Rome is given the primacy of honour, as *primus inter pares*, first among the equals, without implying any jurisdictional authority. Although the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church which was part of the Roman-Byzantine imperial structure may agree to give this privilege to the Bishop of Rome in an otherwise united church, the churches outside the imperial borders, like the church of India, are not bound to accord even this prerogative to the Pope, as this was originally based on the political protocol of the Roman empire granting the first place to the capital city of Rome.

In the Orthodox view, communion with the Bishop of Rome has no special significance other than communion with any other bishop in a united future church. An old imperial christianity with Rome and its bishop as the centre has no relevance for a truly ecumenical church centred on Christ and rooted in the power of the Holy Spirit of God. A collegial succes-

sion in true faith and love of the Apostolic community which witnessed to Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and not an individual succession based on political power, is what is needed for a future church.

The Malankara Orthodox Church is fully committed to the emergence of a truly ecumenical Indian Church and, as its leaders often make clear, it is prepared to enter into a deep ecclesiological dialogue with the sister churches in India belonging to Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions for the realization of this ideal. In such a venture the most important guiding principles, from the Indian Orthodox perspective, are the truly Indian character of the one church and the Apostolic witness to Christ as conveyed to us through St. Thomas and as faithfully maintained by the tradition of the undivided church.

The Ecumenical Institute
Bossey, Geneva.

K. M. George

Mar Thoma Church: Origin, Growth and Ecumenical Involvement

The Mar Thoma Church (full name, *Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar*) is part of the ancient community of Christians on the south-western corner of India, which traces its origin to the apostolic work of St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ, in the fifties of the first Christian century. According to a very strong tradition, the Apostle Thomas landed in A.D. 52 at Cranganore (near the modern Cochin), a port on the Malabar coast. Though this tradition has been questioned by historians for want of evidence, the fact that this is a very ancient and strong tradition cannot be overlooked. "If the story cannot be proved, it is by no means unlikely."¹ "The history of the Christian Church in the first century does not depend entirely on historical documents... In this sense St. Peter's founding of the Roman Church and St. Thomas's founding of the Malabar Church may be said to stand on the same footing. Both are supported by traditions which are sufficiently early and sufficiently strong."² Whatever position one may take as to the veracity of the St. Thomas tradition, the presence of Christians in Malabar as early as the latter part of the second century has been shown with reasonable certainty, if Eusebius of Caesarea can be trusted³.

We know very little of the Malabar Church during the early centuries. But we do know that the Malabar Church has been in contact with the East Syrian Church in Edessa, Babylon, from the fifth century and bishops who came from there exercised episcopal authority in the Malabar Church. As the Babylonian Church came under Nestorian influence, the same influence has come to be even in the Malabar Church. The existence of Christianity in Malabar from very early times is attested by several writers. For example, Day Francis has remarked that "in Malabar from almost the commencement

of the Christian era, a Church has existed which to the Europeans has been amongst the wonders of the Eastern world"⁴. The Malabar Church maintained fraternal relations with the churches in Babylon and Jerusalem till about the close of the 15th century, until the arrival of the Portuguese in India.

With the arrival of Vasco de Gama in Goa in 1498 and the subsequent arrival of large numbers of the Portuguese in India, the history of the Malabar Church entered a new phase. Though the Portuguese came for trade, to begin with, they began to wield their political and ecclesiastical influence over the Indian Church. Using their political power the Portuguese Archbishop Alexio de Menezes succeeded in subjugating the Malabar Church to the authority of Rome in 1599. Thus the Malabar Church remained under Rome till 1653 when a section of the Church came out of the Roman fold and asserted their independent identity. This section of St. Thomas Christians looked to Syria for episcopal continuity and the Jacobite Church of Antioch came to its help. Thus began the connections with the West Syrian Church. This situation continued till the 19th century. The Malabar Church which remained undivided for sixteen centuries suffered the first split when that section of the Church which continued to be with Rome and the other section which remained independent parted company.

The CMS (Church Missionary Society) missionaries from England arrived in Malabar early in the 19th century as a Mission of Help to assist the church in Malabar. The missionaries helped in establishing a theological seminary to improve the quality of the clergy. As a result of the study of the Scriptures and due to the overall influence of the missionaries, some leading priests of the non-Roman section of the church favoured a reformation within the church which had become corrupt and worldly. Among those who favoured the reformation the name of Abraham Malpan, a teacher at the theological seminary, stands preeminent. (*Malpan* means teacher.) Though these priests who favoured the reformation did not mean to leave the parent church, the stiff resistance from the hierarchy forced them out of the church and the reformist group had to align themselves as a separate bloc, which called itself the *Mar*

Thoma Church (Mar Thoma means St. Thomas in Syriac). Thus the Mar Thoma Church is the reformed wing of the non-Roman section of the Malabar Church.

Ethos of the Mar Thoma Church

The Mar Thoma Church has maintained its Indian identity all along. It has retained the Eastern character in worship, liturgy, practices and episcopal celibacy. At the same time the Mar Thoma Church reflects the traits of the Western Church in its emphasis on preaching and teaching of the Bible as well as in missionary outreach. Thus it is a unique combination of Eastern and Western ecclesiastical traits. A Church which had its origin from humble beginnings (one bishop, a few priests and a few thousand lay people) has now grown to be one of the major denominations in India having seven bishops, six-hundred priests and seven and a half lakhs ($3\frac{1}{4}$ million) of people. Though the Church originated in Kerala (Malabar) and still has the majority of people and churches there, it has expanded to the whole of India, Andaman-Nicobar islands, Malay peninsula, Gulf countries, Australia, United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The expansion of the Church outside Kerala began because of the missionary zeal of the Mar Thoma Church. Though Western missionaries worked in India and established churches, Mar Thoma Church was the first national church to send missionaries to different parts of India. Another important factor which enabled the growth of the Mar Thoma Church all over India and outside was the large scale exodus of Mar Thoma Christians to all parts of India, to Gulf countries, UK and North America, either in search of jobs or for other reasons. Thus the Mar Thoma Church besides being a national church has also become a diaspora church. The most vibrant and perceptible mark of the church is its missionary zeal.

Ecclesiological stand

Because of its oriental ecclesial heritage, the Mar Thoma Church maintains the ecclesiology of the Eastern churches. But this is not a monolithic ecclesiology as the members of the church reflect a broad spectrum of ecclesiological traits under the same umbrella. This diversity within the same fold

is an eastern genius in the first place, for the eastern churches do not spell out all the minute details of theology. But the proliferation of sectarian groups and freelance denominations also contributes to this situation as the members of the Church at times get carried away by such groups. It is not surprising, therefore, to notice an uneven ecclesial pattern in the cross section of the members of the Church. One could notice within the same Church a broad spectrum of ecclesiological positions ranging from that of the orthodox churches to near Pentecostal groups. This latitude, on the one hand, reflects the theological freedom within the Church, while it may be its weakness on the other. This predicament is largely due to the lack of adequate doctrinal teaching in the Church even though there is enough study of the Bible. Again, the problem is that much of Bible study and teaching tends to move towards more conservative side as a result of the pervasive influence of the over-conservative groups on the rank and file of the Church.

Impact of Reformation on the theology and practices of the Mar Thoma Church

1. Prayer for the dead and invocation of saints were dropped.
2. Phrases and sentences which were liable to be misunderstood were either modified or dropped. For example, the prayer said by the celebrant holding the eucharistic bread, which read thus, was dropped: "Thee I am holding who holds the bounds of the earth; Thee I am holding who orders the depths; Thee, O God, do I place in my mouth."
3. Words which suggested that the Eucharist was a literal continuation of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary were dropped, and they were substituted by words such as — "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving", "sacrifice of grace and peace", and so on.
4. In the prereformation period there was a prevalent notion that the sacraments had magical powers. The objective and transcendental value of the sacraments were overstressed at the expense of penitence and faith. The reformers, while not minimising the efficacy of the sacraments, maintained the need of repentance, renewal and faith-commitment.
5. While it cannot be denied that the "low church" theological position of the CMS missionaries had influenced the reformers,

the initiative of the missionaries in translating the Bible into Malayalam promoted the study and teaching of the Bible. The availability of the liturgy in Malayalam facilitated greater involvement and participation of the laity in the liturgy. Public confession and demystification of the Eucharist enabled more frequent reception of the sacrament.

6. The Church from its earlier position of a superorganisation and the domain of the clergy, became an *ecclesia* of the whole people of God, sacerdotal ecclesiology giving way to a more holistic eschatology.

Contributions to political and social Life

As an autonomous and national Church, the Mar Thoma Church has been in the fore-front of national life. Lay persons like T. M. Varghese, K. K. Kuruvila and C. P. Mathew, and Metropolitans Abraham Mar Thoma and Juhanon Mar Thoma of hallowed memory made their mark in varying degrees in the freedom struggles and the nationalist movement. Besides having Mar Thoma members in Parliament and in Kerala Legislative Assembly, the appointment of Dr. M. M. Thomas, a Mar Thoma layman, as the governor of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, is the latest case in point. Metropolitan Abraham Mar Thoma resisted the move of the Travancore kingdom to remain out of the Indian Union and Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma advocated the abolition of Zamindari system in India. Mar Thoma Church under the leadership of Juhanon Mar Thoma actively and generously responded to the Bhoodan movement of Vinoba Bhave to provide land to the landless. Mar Thoma Church was a pioneer in building houses for the homeless people in Kerala, a programme which is still continuing in many of the Mar Thoma parishes. The government of Kerala got its inspiration to build one lakh houses for the poor from the example provided by the Church. The Church has many educational and medical institutions. Rural development projects, homes for the orphans, the destitute and the aged are some of the other activities of the Church. The members of the Church are, by and large, socially conscious and politically enlightened. Many of the parishes have their own welfare programmes and projects to help the weaker sections of the society.

Ecumenical involvement and challenges

The Mar Thoma Church has been ecumenically alert from the beginning. It became a member of the National Missionary Council when such a body came into being (1912), which later became the National Christian Council and more recently became the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Similarly it has had close co-operation with the National Missionary Society (NMS) from its inception, and is an active member of the Kerala Christian Council which is an ecumenical council of churches in Kerala. Mar Thoma Metropolitan Titus II attended the National Conference at Calcutta in 1912 which was a follow-up conference of the World Ecumenical Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910 (Edinburgh Conference may be described as the precursor to the modern ecumenical movement).

Mar Thoma Church has been a founder member of the World Council of Churches (1948) and has been closely associated with it all along. Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma was one of the presidents of the WCC from 1954 to 1961 and Dr. M. M. Thomas was the moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC for a term, besides serving in several other capacities.

Mar Thoma relations with other churches

Mar Thoma Church had established intercommunion relationship with the Anglican Church in India (known as the Church in India, Burma and Ceylon) and established a concordat (agreement) between the two churches (mutual acceptance of the ministry, broad consensus about doctrinal matters and participation in the laying on of hands during episcopal consecration of either Church). This relationship at the national level facilitated a wider relationship with the Anglican communions all over the world. The relations with the Anglican Church made it easier for relations with CSI and CNI when they came into being even though there were also non-episcopal churches in those unions.

Not much after the formation of the Church of South India (1947) the Mar Thoma Church appointed a theological commission to study the doctrines of the CSI, particularly

doctrines of Church and Ministry. Though the CSI had non-episcopally ordained ministers also, the fact that the CSI had decided to have episcopacy in its constitution and to have only episcopally ordained ministers in the new Church helped the Mar Thoma Church to enter into intercommunion relationship with the CSI from 1957 onwards. In the case of the Church of North India (CNI) this problem did not arise as the CNI chose to have the integration of ministry from the time of union (by the process of mutual laying on of hands all the ministers of the CNI came to be episcopally ordained). Therefore the Mar Thoma Church established intercommunion with the CNI straightaway (CNI was formed in 1970).

CSI-CNI-Mar Thoma Joint Council

CSI, CNI and Mar Thoma Church appointed a joint theological commission to study the possibilities of closer cooperation between these churches. The recommendations of the joint commission were passed on to the three churches, and in 1978 a Joint Council of the three churches was formed. Though the immediate aim of the joint council was to work out closer cooperation between these churches, the possibility of a union of the three churches, however distant it might be, was not ruled out. As to the proposal of adopting a common name for the three churches to manifest the already achieved oneness, there was no agreement. Hence the idea was dropped. Whether the name should reflect the final stage of union or the initial stage was the bone of contention. Again, on the type of closeness or oneness that should be aimed at, there is considerable difference of opinion.

The Joint Council has three major commissions under it: theological commission, commission on issue of national importance, and the commission for mission. The different commissions have met a few times. There have been meetings of the bishops of the three churches, so also joint clergy meet, joint women's meet and youth meet. All the three churches are cooperating in a mission project in Sikkim. The joint council continues to meet once in two years having representatives from all the three churches. But it must be said that not much headway has been possible beyond the present level and the future of the Council does not look very bright.

The apparent impasse in forging still closer ties between these churches is due to the difference of opinion between the Mar Thoma Church on the one hand and the other two churches on the other. The CSI, in particular, has been pressing for an organic union of the three churches on the model that they themselves went through. The CNI, being a relatively younger Church, has not made such a strong plea so far. The Mar Thoma Church, on the other hand, would prefer a conciliar type of relationship between these churches whereby close co-operation in areas of mission and witness could be tried at least for the time being, but to retain the identity and autonomy of each Church. Both the CSI and the CNI are unions of Western Protestant denominations and, therefore, share a common ecclesial heritage. But the Mar Thoma Church has an entirely different heritage and it would be a pity if its eastern genius and ethos get dissolved in a numerically large Protestant bloc. Moreover there is a constitutional hitch as far as the Mar Thoma Church is concerned. In the preamble of its constitution there is an inviolable clause to say that neither its name nor form nor identity can be altered anytime and under any circumstance. So any morphological alteration or dissolution of the Church, which involves the loss of its identity can be challenged and nullified by any Mar Thoma member. Therefore, any sort of impatience by the other churches will only impede relationship. Working and growing together within the already achieved closeness will be the right move on the part of these churches.

Is organic union the best model ?

Upto the fifties of this century the most popular model of Church union was the organic unity. For example, when the CSI was formed in 1947 the whole world lauded it as a unique and bold attempt in ecumenism. But the trend has changed in the sixties and early seventies. Both at the Faith and Order consultations and at the Uppsala and Nairobi assemblies of the WCC the stress was on a wider concept of ecumenism to include the whole of humankind and even the whole of creation. Terms such as "wider ecumenism", "secular ecumenism" are the clichés of our time. The concept of "Conciliar Unity" came out very forcefully at the Nairobi

assembly of the WCC (1975), especially through the brilliant expositions made by John Deschner. Deschner quoted the New Testament examples of independent churches coming together through a common council, such as the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The Jewish and the Gentile churches were so different in ethos, culture and style. Yet they could agree on common concerns of mission and witness. It was a typical example of conciliar (through a common council) relationship. This model has become much more popular now in ecumenical circles. A merger of culturally and ecclesially independent churches need not necessarily prove to be more ecumenical than a healthy and functionally efficient conciliar relationship. Even after more than forty years of staying together as a united church, the CSI has got to go a very long way in terms of cultural and emotional integration. Whether it is in politics or in society or in church, the mood everywhere today seems to be in favour of particularity and regional identity. Therefore, to hasten to an artificial merger of heterogeneous churches can be counterproductive. This leads us to the more fundamental question. Is ecumenism to be limited to the churches? What about the people of other faiths?

Challenges of wider ecumenism

Narrow Faith and Order concerns and ecclesiological issues are no longer on top of the ecumenical agenda today. The unity of all humankind and the reconciliation of the whole creation are more pressing concerns. After the Uppsala assembly the WCC established a unit for dialogue with people of other faiths. Burning issues such as racism, apartheid, discrimination of women (feminism), nuclear threat, destruction of the environment are some of the major concerns of the WCC at present. Therefore, ecclesiology in narrow sense (finding out which is the real church) or whose ministry is more valid or the "pipeline" theory of apostolic succession (unbroken episcopacy, if any Church really has it!) are no longer vital issues. The Faith and Order Commission (of which the Catholic Church is also a member) would never have been able to produce a BEM document (Lima Text) had they been exercising themselves on narrow Faith and Order issues alone.

To involve oneself in the struggles for liberation from oppressive social and political systems and structures is the greatest ecumenical challenge of our time. When narrow communalism and religious fundamentalism have their heyday in our country, there is little wonder that church union concerns have gone to the background. The awareness of having to preserve the environment is becoming increasingly clear to people of all faiths. It is necessary for the survival of life on our planet.

Though the secular issues are noncontroversial topics for all denominations, there is very little united effort to fight the evils of the society. A new type of ecumenism is needed today where the christians could form common fronts for action. The christians know (at least ought to know) that God in Christ has reconciled the whole of humankind and the whole created order to himself. Therefore, this vision of a wider ecumenism is not merely a challenge to us, but our understanding of the very nature of the Church.

United Theological College
Bangalore — 560 046

M. V. Abraham

Footnotes

1. F. E. Keay, *A History of the Syrian Church in India*, third edn New Delhi, I. S. P. C. K, 1960, p. 14.
2. Juhanon Mar Thoma, *Christianity in India and a Brief History of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, Revised edn., Madras, Thompson & Co, 1968, p. 3.
3. Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V. Ch. 9 cited by J.N. Ogilvie. *Apostles of India*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1915, pp. 38ff.
4. Day Francis, *The Land of the Perumals; Cochin: its Past and Present*, Madras, 1863, p. 211.

The Church of North India: Its History, Vision and Life

I. A Brief History

The Church of North India has evolved out of a union of six Churches after nearly forty years of prayerful negotiations and quest for unity in accordance with the prayer of Christ "that they may all be one".

Unity is of the essence of the Church. When the Lord of the Church prays "that they may be one even as we are one" (Jn. 17:11-22), "that they may become perfectly one" (17:23) and "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us" (Jn. 17:21), he is revealing the truth that the unity within the Holy Trinity and the unity within the Church are of the same order. The unity of the Godhead is manifested in and recognised by the world in the unity or oneness of the Church. Disunity in the Church is tantamount to a denial of the unity of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The call to Christian unity is inherent in the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as in the other New Testament writings. But it is more acutely realised when Christians commit themselves to Christ's mission and engage in the task of proclaiming the gospel of salvation. A divided Church cannot credibly proclaim "the unity of the Spirit", "one body", "one hope", "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all..." (Eph. 4:4-6). This has been realised by Christians in India over the past 150 years. With the preaching of the gospel in India by foreign missionaries all the denominational divisions of the West were also planted. The result was the establishment of a divided Church faced with the gigantic

task of proclaiming a message of reconciliation in a religiously pluralistic society.

A call to unite for mission in India first came in early nineteenth century (1810) from William Carey. The International Missionary Conference of 1910 held in Edinburgh contributed much to bringing Churches together. A conference of Church leaders held at Tranquebar in South India in 1919 brought into clearer focus the sins of division and the need for concrete steps to be taken towards an organic reunion of Churches in India. The Conference stated:

We believe that the challenge of the present hour... calls us to mourn our past divisions and turn to our Lord Jesus Christ to seek in Him the unity of the body expressed in one visible Church. We face together the titanic task of the winning of India for Christ — one-fifth of the human race. Yet confronted by such an overwhelming responsibility, we find ourselves rendered weak and relatively impotent by our unhappy divisions — divisions for which we were not responsible, and which have been, as it were, imposed upon us from without. (Cited from *Forward to Union*, ISPCK & LPH, 1968, p. 2)

This led to the union of various Congregationalists and Presbyterians and the formation of the United Church of Northern India in 1924. The ripples of unity expanded. The Round Table Conference of representatives of Churches held at Lucknow in 1929 paved the way for deliberate negotiations for organic union. This resulted in the evolution of the Church of South India in 1947. For union in North India the Negotiating Committee, which met at Calcutta in 1951, produced the first *Plan of Church Union in North India*. This Plan was subsequently revised in 1954 and 1957 and 1965. The fourth edition of the *Plan of Church Union in North India* published in 1965 formed the 'basis' on which six Churches united in North India. Originally, seven Churches had participated in the negotiations for Church union in North India. But one of these Churches — The Methodist Church in Southern Asia, now known as the Methodist Church in India — decided to withdraw in 1970. The remaining six Churches acting through their respective constitutional procedures and representative ecclesiastical, legislative and exe-

cutive bodies entered into the union. They did so after much study, prayer and negotiations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in obedience to Christ's will. Their intention and convictions in seeking unity have been well expressed by the Negotiating Committee in the following words which form a part of the Plan of Union:

We are seeking union because we believe that the restoration of the visible unity of the Church on earth is the will of God... We believe that the unity to which God is leading us will make the Church in North India a more effective instrument for his work, more eager and powerful to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Christ, filled with greater charity and peace, and enriched in worship and fellowship (*Plan of Church Union in North India*, p. ix).

The six Churches which united were: The Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon (which was at that time a Province of the Anglican Communion and was also known as the "Church of India"); The Methodist Church (British and Australasian Conference); The United Church of Northern India; The Disciples of Christ; The Church of the Brethren; Several Congregations of the Council of the Baptist Churches in Northern India. The union of these Churches was inaugurated through a representative act of declaration, dedication and celebration at Nagpur on 29th November, 1970. Through the prior decisions of the uniting Churches and through their participation in this representative act of Union, these six Churches became "The Church of North India" and ceased to exist as separate ecclesiastical and legal entities, and the Church of North India became their successor.

The following features of this Union are noteworthy:-

a) Basis of the Union

The basis of the Union of these six Churches accepted by them may be summed up as follows:-

(i) The recognition of the fact that God wills the Church to be visibly one so that the Church may be a more effective instrument of God's mission in the world.

(ii). Acceptance of the divinely inspired scriptures of the Old

Testament and the New Testament as the standard of faith and conduct.

(iii) Acceptance of the classical Creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed as witnessing to and safeguarding the faith of the Church.

(iv) Acceptance of the dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion/Eucharist).

(v) Mutual recognition and acceptance, by the uniting Churches, of each other's Ministry.

b) Union and unification of the ministry

This is the first Union in the history of Christianity involving as many as six Churches with vastly diverse traditions and polity (i.e., congregational, presbyterian and episcopal).

The inauguration of the Union was immediately followed by "The Representative Act of Unification of the Ministry". In this act, through prayer and a mutual laying on of hands, the united Church received from God a unified Ministry acceptable to the whole Church from the beginning. It is the three-fold Ministry of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons within the broader framework of the "priesthood of all believers". The episcopate is both *historic* (i.e., in historic continuity with the early Church) and *constitutional* (i.e., the Bishops are appointed and they exercise their functions in accordance with the Constitution of the Church of North India).

c) Baptism and communicant membership

As Baptist Churches which practise Believer's Baptism have united with other Churches which also uphold the ancient practice of baptising children, the Church of North India accepts both the Believer's Baptism and Baptism of children as two alternative practices. In the case of parents desiring their children to be baptised when they grow up there is provision for the "Blessing of Children" in their infancy. Admission to communicant membership of the baptized is through "Confirmation or its equivalent rite".

d) Ordained ministry and organisational structures

The Church of North India while valuing the three-fold ordained ministry of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons gives

due place within its life and work to the ministry of laity. At the 4th Synod held in October 1980, the CNI decided to admit women to the ordained ministry. At present there are ordained women in the Dioceses of Lucknow, Delhi, Calcutta, Jabalpur, Chandigarh, Cuttack and Kolhapur. Its organisational and administrative structure is composed of congregations and pastorates which are the basic local units of the Church under the care of presbyters, and of the Dioceses which are composed of several pastorates spread over a large area under the care of Diocesan Bishops and administered through Diocesan Councils. There are 23 Dioceses at present in the Church of North India spread over nearly two-thirds of the country north of Andhra Pradesh. The total membership of the Church is about 9,00,000. "The supreme, supervisory, legislative and executive body of the Church" and "the organ of the whole Church, comprising all the Dioceses" is the Synod, which is the "final authority in all matters pertaining to the Church" under the headship of Christ. The Synod is composed of all the Diocesan bishops and ordained and lay representatives of the Dioceses. It meets once in three years. For administration of the Church and its institutions there are several Boards of Institutions and Standing Committees. At all levels in the organisational structure of the Church both ordained and lay persons participate through various Committees. There is also provision for participation of women and young people in the life and mission of the Church at various levels but specially through the Women's Fellowship for Christian Service and the Youth Fellowships.

e) Unity in diversity

The Union has not meant absorption of one Church by another. The united Church values and is enriched by the diverse spiritual and liturgical heritage of the uniting Churches. It is a *unity in diversity*. The members of the CNI are assured of full freedom of belief and practice in so far as these do not conflict with the faith and order of the whole Church, and do not endanger unity and the fellowship of the Church. No form of worship or spirituality is imposed on any congregation. Over the past 18 years new forms of worship have been evolving in the process of growing together.

f) United to unite

This united Church is also a uniting Church. It is in full intercommunion relationship with all the Churches with which the six uniting Churches were in communion at the time of the Union. It entered into full inter-communion relationship with the Church of South India and the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and in 1978 a Joint Council of these three Churches was formed to grow further towards visible unity of these three Churches and for joint action in mission. With its deep commitment to the unity of the Church the CNI is a member of national and global ecumenical organisations and confessional bodies such as the National Council of Churches in India, the World Council of Churches, the Anglican Consultative Council, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia etc.

Union negotiations with the Methodist Church in India

In 1985 the Church of North India initiated negotiations for Church union with the Methodist Church in India (MCI, formerly known as the Methodist Church in Southern Asia). These negotiations are being carried on through a Union Negotiations Committee composed of seven representatives from each of the two Churches. Six meetings of this CNI-MCI-Union Negotiations Committee have already taken place. This Committee had recommended to the MCI and the CNI to work towards mutual recognition and unification of the ordained ministry of the two Churches to achieve full inter-communion as an *interim* goal on the way to a union of these two Churches, the nature and form of which union to be mutually decided by the two Churches. The modalities for unification of the ordained ministry of the two Churches were to be drawn up by the Union Negotiations Committee if the CNI and the MCI were to approve of the recommendation made by the Union Negotiations Committee. However, on account of different perceptions of the basic mandate given to the Union Negotiations Committee by the two Churches the Committee at its last meeting held on 8th February, 1990, referred its mandate back to the two Churches for clarification regarding the goal of the current negotiations.

II. Vision and Life of the CNI— Problems and Progress

Over the past nineteen years the Church of North India has grown maturer and stronger in its *unity, witness and service*. But there have also been some problems caused by some members of the CNI here and there who have dragged the Church into litigation in some places because of their vested interests in Church property or funds, or in a bid to gain or to hold on to administrative positions. Some members of the CNI who had a vested interest in Church properties and funds have tried to revive the erstwhile Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon (CIPBC) or the erstwhile United Church of Northern India which had ceased to exist because of their union in the Church of North India on 29th November, 1970. They alleged that the CNI was not the successor to the CIPBC, the UCNI and the other four Churches which had united. But in a strong judgement given in favour of the CNI on 16th August, 1988, the Hon'ble Senior Sub-Judge of Amritsar Court categorically stated that "the Church of North India is the successor of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon".

Unity, witness and service

The motto of the Church of North India is "Unity, Witness, Service". With this in focus the Church of North India continues to grow in unity, witness and service. The Union has brought to the united Church not only the strength of numbers but also a new sense of mission, particularly in relation to the socio-economic, political, cultural and multi-religious context of contemporary India. Over the past twelve years through the intermingling of traditions for the former Churches a new 'CNI ethos' is developing. Liturgical Commission has been hard at work and already the new CNI forms of worship and services for various occasions (e.g., Morning and Evening Worship, the Ordinal, the Lord's Supper, Believers' Baptism, Baptism of Children, Burial Service; Marriage Service and several other orders of services) have been produced in attractive booklet-forms. These have been widely used. The numerous medical, agricultural, educational, technical and social-service institutions of the CNI are the established channels of its service to the millions in the country, and these not only cater to the physical needs of the

people but also work towards development of the marginalised, and transformation of society. The Synodical Board of Social Services is involved in numerous development programmes, combating poverty, illiteracy, social injustices and exploitation, as well as training leaders for the future.

A vision of ecclesial unity

The Church of North India has not as yet formally described the nature of unity it seeks with other Churches, or its own vision of the unity of all Churches. However, from its own experience of "organic union" of six diverse Churches, and as a result of its active participation in the ecumenical movement as well as from its experience of being in a religiously pluralistic context of India it seems to work towards such a union of Churches from which may evolve a purified, renewed and united Church which will include the following elements in its life:

Where members of the uniting Churches may freely receive one another in deep and warm Christian fellowship (*Koinonia*) despite differences and diversities and especially in common sharing of the Word of God and the sacraments;

Where the uniting Churches will together participate in the decision-making processes governing the life and mission of the Church and its members, not only in matters of faith and order but also in the deployment of personnel and economic resources;

Where the uniting Churches will unite under a common name as sign and demonstration of their mutual acceptance of each other in Christ and of belonging to his one Church;

Where the gift of unity and the union of the Churches will be celebrated both through fellowship gatherings, worship (liturgy), and corporate action in Christ's mission;

Where in its organisational life and ordained ministry the united Church will be in the episcopal tradition (both *historic* and *constitutional*) and baptisms of both infants and believers will be recognised as alternate ways of expressing incorporation into the body of Christ without scruples;

Where the ordained ministry will truly represent and exercise the caring, serving and suffering ministry of the Church as

the body of Christ, and also where every member of the Church will be drawn into the ministry of the whole Church for the wholeness of the whole creation;

Where the united Church as a whole and its members individually will live for peace, reconciliation, healing, love and justice not only within the Christian community but for the world at large which God loves;

Where the united Church will be truly indigenous in its thinking, spirituality and life style and will rely more on the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through its life and worship than on its institutions, wealth and expertise;

Where the uniting Churches will receive from God the gift of unity in accordance with His will so that the world may know the Lord Jesus Christ and the liberating power of his gospel.

Unity and renewal for mission

Has the Union brought new life into the Churches which united? We answer this question in the words of David M. Gill who shares the experience of the Uniting Church in Australia, which was formed in 1977 through a union of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, and with which the CNI is in inter-communion relationship and partnership in mission:

Positively, union helped us discover the church as a dynamic, living organism rather than something looked up in forms inherited from centuries past. Old ways and inherited assumptions could be examined afresh to disentangle those bearing the abiding marks of the Gospel from those echoing long gone theological disputes or cultural accretions. We began to discover gifts and resources too long neglected or even repressed — for example, in the role of the laity, the ministry of elders, and the uses to which the church's considerable resources of personnel and property are put. Church-manship became exciting.

But union also distracted us from renewal. The inevitable pre-occupation with changing structures consumed valuable time and energy. Unfamiliar procedures damaged morale. Some, in their insecurity, were tempted to rely

on regulations more than relationships for solving problems. (*Tradition and Innovation: A Search for a Relevant Ecclesiology in Asia*. Edited by CTC-CCA, Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1983, p. 45).

The experience of the Church of North India has been the same. The first twelve years after the Union have been a period of growing together, experimenting, learning, organising and stream-lining of the constitution and organisational structures. There have been some set-backs due to property or legal problems, and sometimes due to old denominational biases. And yet the Church has been renewed and has grown in maturity and in obedience to the demands of the gospel of Christ.

Priorities of the CNI for 1990-2000 AD

In 1983 the Church of North India decided to evaluate its life and work with a view to determining its priorities for the last decade of the twentieth century in the light of its original vision. The Synod of the Church of North India at its 7th meeting held at Delhi from 3rd to 10th October, 1989, determined the following *nine* priorities which appropriately reflect its vision, its aspirations and its determination to go forward in unity and mission:

1. Spiritual renewal.
2. Unity within the Church of North India and with other Churches.
3. Mission and Evangelism.
4. Development of Christian leadership.
5. Socio-economic and political concerns, particularly the struggles of the oppressed and marginalised sections of society — such as women, *dalits*, indigenous communities (tribals) etc. — for their self-development, dignity and wholesome life.
6. Dialogue with people of other faiths.
7. Structural changes (within the CNI) leading to decentralisation, democratisation and devolution of power.
8. Indigenisation and contextualisation of the life, work and worship of the Church.
9. Self-reliance in personnel and financial resources.

While problems and difficulties will always be there, the Church of North India gives thanks to God for the gift of unity it has received from God and celebrates it with joy and with prayer for all Churches that "they may all be one" according to Christ's will. Unity brings with it strength and renewal for Christ's mission in the world.

Bishop's House
1 Church Lane
(off North Avenue)
New Delhi-110 001.

Pritam B. Santram

Pentecostal Ecclesiology: Promises and Problems

Introduction

Significance

Protestant Christianity has no faster growing movement than Pentecostalism, so that its very existence and expansion are viewed as a threat by the denominationally-determined and, one hopes, as a promise by the ecumenically minded¹.

This observation was made way back in 1965 by Horton Davies, who was professor of History of Christianity at Princeton University. Recent studies also confirm that today there are many millions of Pentecostals who collectively constitute the fastest growing segment of Christianity in the world². Vinson Synan, a well known pentecostal historian, quoting David Barret, claims that today the Pentecostals constitute the largest Protestant group³. If such is the case, this expeditious growth of the Pentecostals alone should justify our attempt to study their ecclesiology in the context of our search for ecclesiological convergence.

Purpose

As Horton Davies observed, on the one hand, some view the expansion of Pentecostalism as a threat, and on the other hand, others discern it as a promise. The purpose of this article is to review the ecclesiology of the Pentecostals — the nature of the church, its structure, forms of ministry, mission and unity as understood by them. We shall look for promises and challenges which pentecostal ecclesiology holds out to other churches, and try to point out problems inherent in pentecostal ecclesiology.

Limitations

Before we discuss the ecclesiology of the Pentecostals, there is need for a few clarifications. First of all, the use of the title 'Pentecostal' has to be discussed. One often finds an unrestricted use of it. It appears that this term can be so freely used by meeting one basic requirement, i.e., emphasising the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit. Vinson Synan identifies five types of Pentecostals: 1) Classical Pentecostals: The distinguishing mark of these groups is their acceptance of the "initial evidence" theory which holds that *glossolalia* (speaking in other tongues) is the necessary first evidence of receiving the "baptism in the Holy Spirit"; 2) Mainline Protestant Charismatics: They do not subscribe to the "initial evidence" theory; 3) Catholic Charismatics who also do not accept the "initial evidence" theory; 4) Independent groups which are person centered. These churches are sometimes known as "Faith Churches"; and 5) Third World indigenous groups⁴.

Of these five groups of Pentecostals, only among the first group can we look for a distinctive theology of the Church because mainly they are the ones who seek to maintain a denominational identity different from other churches and the ones who have attempted to articulate in some form the theology of the *Ecclesia*.

The second point that is to be remembered is that there seems to be a common presumption that the Pentecostals are less theologically minded than other Christians. Their scholars themselves acknowledge this. According to Russel P. Spittler,

Pentecostals have always been better at evangelism than writing theology. We are known more for foreign missions than for theological books. That is as it should be: in my opinion, the theologian must always be the servant of the church. But the time has come to pluck a ripened pentecostal theology⁵.

Vinson Synan points out as to why probably a pentecostal theology is delayed. In his opinion:

...Pentecostalism has been more interested in spirituality than in theology. Theology is seen in quite practical terms and it relates mostly to the explanation and justification of spiritual phenomena as experienced in the movement... As

of now a fully developed "pentecostal" theology does not exist; and many hope that one never does come into existence, since they feel that "letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive". It is not that Pentecostals think theology to be unimportant but there is concern that theology serve spiritual reality than that spirituality serve theology⁶.

If one hopes to find among the Pentecostals something like the Vatican II document or the Lima document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, he/she is in for sure disappointment. There is no international body for the Pentecostals to formulate and articulate pentecostal theology. The World Pentecostal Conference seems to be nothing but a gathering together for fellowship and mutual enrichment. It is probably this lack of any proper theological document which makes some think that pentecostal movement is not yet fully mature and worthy of theological investigation⁷.

In spite of the above mentioned apprehensions, it is acknowledged in some circles that there definitely exists a pentecostal theology. According to Walter J. Hollenweger, the negative understanding about pentecostal theology "can only be overcome by careful field research, tape recordings, and analysis of the oral forms of theology which prevail in the worldwide pentecostal community"⁸. Even though we don't find creeds or theological documents, the oral forms of theology that are found among the Pentecostals should be acknowledged by all. In William G. MacDonald's view, "pentecostal theology consists of oral tradition rather than of extensive creeds and theological tomes"⁹.

Taking into account the second limitation discussed above, one becomes aware how difficult it is to construct a paper on pentecostal ecclesiology. For our sources of information we have to depend upon brief mentions of this topic made in the fundamental doctrines of different churches and also upon works written by individual pentecostal scholars. Here again there is yet another limitation. That is, most of the works available are from scholars belonging to one denomination, namely, the 'Assemblies of God', which is one of the largest pentecostal denominations.

A. The understanding of the Church

During the very early years of pentecostal revival, it is quite doubtful if the pentecostals ever dreamt of organizing themselves into denominations. They seem to have been more interested in "practical revivalism"¹⁰ than in organized denominations. If ever they had a church ideal, it was different from the established churches. According to Nil Bloch-Hoell,

The pentecostal ideal is the society-church, a fellowship of professed christians. This becomes evident in the pentecostal puritanism and in its criticism of the 'worldly and formal' established churches¹¹.

L. Howard Juillerat expresses the view that the first adherents of the Church of God were "desirous to be free from all man-made creeds and traditions"¹². E. S. Williams, an Assemblies of God theologian, also expresses a similar view. He says, "God has brought us out of old, dead ecclesiasticism and denominationalism. He has made us free people, and we are not going back into 'Babylon' any more"¹³. It is true of all the pentecostal groups of the first-generation that they conceive of the Church as a fellowship of believers who meet a certain standard of life. They consider the established churches in some way as hindrances to their spiritual life.

Even though they were opposed to established churches in the beginning, it is a historical fact that within a few years after the beginning of the pentecostal movement, the Pentecostals established themselves into different denominations. Yet it is a sad fact that most of them did not clearly define their position on ecclesiology. It is surprising that the "Statement of Truth", adopted by the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America, which is made up of fifteen major pentecostal bodies, formed in 1948, has no article on the Church. The eighth article just says, "we believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ"¹⁴.

But it is refreshing to note that the preamble of the Constitution of the Assemblies of God which was revised in 1981, contains a few significant insights on pentecostal ecclesiology. It states that God's purpose concerning man is to seek and to save that which is lost, to be worshipped by man and to build

a body of believers in the image of His Son. These believers, according to the Assemblies of God, constitute the body or the Church of Jesus Christ built and established upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. It goes on to say that the members of the *ecclesia* are enjoined to assemble themselves for worship, fellowship, counsel and instruction in the Word of God, the work of the ministry and for the exercise of these spiritual gifts and offices provided for in the New Testament Church order¹⁵.

The idea that the *ecclesia* is a body of believers being built in the image of Jesus Christ is shared by all Pentecostals. But does it mean that all people belonging to the Pentecostal Churches are members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ? And does it also mean that salvation can be received only by being a member of a pentecostal church? In early times there was a dangerous tendency to believe that all Pentecostals were believers and that outside pentecostal churches salvation could not be found. Today we hardly find anyone who would claim that all Pentecostals are true members of the body of Jesus Christ. But the idea that outside pentecostal churches there is no salvation is still found though not in a large measure.

Once the pentecostal denominations became organized there was clear recognition that there were two types of members in the church: 1) Those who were members in name and profession only; 2) All those who were born again of the Spirit of God¹⁶. Today, this is an accepted view among all the Pentecostals. There is also a growing feeling against the idea that salvation cannot be found outside pentecostal groups. According to J. D. Bright, pentecostal denominations are parts of the body of Christ, but not to the exclusion of other consistent christian denominations¹⁷.

Is it a sect or a church?

Even though the title "Pentecostal Churches" is widely used, one often finds the term "sectarian" being freely used to refer to the Pentecostals. In this context it is appropriate that we briefly discuss whether the Pentecostals constitute a sect or a church. It is pointed out that whether pentecostalism can be called sectarianism is dependent on how we under-

stand the word 'sect'. There always seems to be a tendency to identify sect with some kind of heresy¹⁸. But it would be quite inappropriate to accuse the Pentecostals of any heresy. If they can be accused of anything it is only of over-emphasising the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

'Sect' is defined as a movement of reaction, the followers of which are very much personally engaged¹⁹. According to this definition, the Pentecostals may be considered as sectarians. But it is increasingly felt that the sectarianism of the movement is gradually disappearing. According to Nils Bloch-Hoell, The Pentecostal movement is, in fact, an outstanding example in church history of a movement of reaction gradually developing in the direction of the very type of religious body or denomination against which it originally arose as a movement of reform²⁰.

Membership in the church

'Born-again' experience and baptism by immersion are two preconditions for membership in the pentecostal churches. Some give membership only to those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. This is unfair because not all those who long to be blessed with the experience of *glossolalia* are actually blessed. Since it is a divine gift, and not considered to be necessary for salvation, is it just to make it a pre-condition for church membership? It is possible also to raise a few questions about the second pre-condition, i.e., baptism. The Pentecostals do not believe that any saving grace is received through baptism. To them it is primarily an external sign of the inner experience of becoming a new being in Jesus Christ. While it is highly desirable that baptism accompanies repentance, as was the case when John the Baptist, Jesus Christ our Lord and the apostles preached in the first century, it is possibly questionable if we make it a necessary pre-condition for membership in the church, especially in contexts where baptism involves many social implications in addition to theological significance. It is refreshing to note that some pentecostal churches, especially the Assemblies of God in some geographical areas, do keep the Eucharist open even to those who are not baptized.

In this context it may also be noted that not only the entry into the church is guarded by the Pentecostals but also, after admission, the moral standard of life of the member is watched over by strict church discipline²¹. The attempt to maintain the moral standard of life is highly commendable. But excommunication, though practised only in extreme cases, needs reconsideration for two reasons: first, in most cases an excommunicated person is absorbed by another pentecostal church without any chance of repentance; second, it is better that a person remains in the church and listens to the Word which offers a better possibility for repentance.

B. The local Church

One of the most important contributions of the pentecostal churches probably is their energetic upholding of the autonomy of the local church. According to Levi Pethrus, a Swedish pentecostal leader, all organizing beyond the local church is unbiblical. The Pentecostals believe that each congregation should be free and independent as were all the congregations mentioned in the Scriptures²². According to them, for any understanding and description of the church, one should look not at any denomination, but at the local church. It is in the local church we should look to find the marks of the Church: "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic".

C. The Church and the Kingdom of God

Unlike most other christians, the Pentecostals consider the Church and the Kingdom of God as one and the same. E. S. Williams has the following to say about this topic:

With full appreciation of those who differentiate kingdom truths from church truths, we must conclude that the Church and the spiritual Kingdom are one and the same with slightly different connotations. When Jesus said, "I will build my Church", He also said to Peter, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19).

This position could be accepted if by church we mean all those who experience the grace of God through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But, however much we may try, it is nearly impossible to think of the church apart from the institutiona-

lized church. It sounds more reasonable to consider the church as the sign and instrument of the kingdom of God which is promised to us through Jesus Christ.

D. Church structure and forms of ministry

Even though the pentecostal denominations generally accept a presbyterian form of church government (government vested on elders including laymen), they do recognize that the Scriptures do support differing views of church government. They agree that all forms have limitations. According to them no episcopal form of government which ignores the wishes of the ministry, or of the laity, is God's form. And no form which ignores authority other than that of local membership is God's plan either²⁴. Although there is very highly commendable lay participation in many churches, there are some churches, like the Assemblies of God, which do not give lay participation at the executive committee level.

While on the one hand there is the presbyterian form of government, on the other hand a theology of the ministry is being discussed in quite different lines. Pentecostals generally believe that Christ has given to the Church a five-fold ministry, that is of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11)²⁵. But one seldom finds a church that ordains persons as apostles, prophets or teachers. In fact, in most pentecostal churches, 'ordination' is not to any of the above offices. It is simply some kind of recognition conferred on one who has been in active ministry for four or more years in the capacity of an evangelist, teacher or in most cases a pastor. It is interesting to note that in most churches a minister can do all the ministries except solemnizing weddings before ordination. This is an area that demands more serious pentecostal deliberation and articulation.

Women's ordination

Contrary to general belief, in the pentecostal movement there is no serious theological objection to women's ordination to the ministry. It is acknowledged that since their inception, pentecostal churches have been pioneers in the ordination of women²⁶. However, in India so far no pentecostal church has started ordaining women. The reasons could be cultural.

Charismatic structuring of the church's ministry

It is pointed out that the charismatic movement has in many places brought new life to the worship services while the structure of service and ministry has remained the same as ever²⁷. This observation is made about the charismatic mainline churches. I think it is true of the classical Pentecostals as well. In these churches there is the need for developing a charismatic structure of ministry by which the church will positively make use of different charismata found among its members.

E. The mission of the Church

Elaborating on the mission of the church, G. Raymond Carlson of the Assemblies of God says,

The priority reason-for-being of the Assemblies of God was determined to be threefold: 1) ministry to the Lord; 2) ministry to the saints; 3) ministry to the world²⁸.

The ministry to the Lord is expressed in and through our worship of and fellowship with God. It is in this context the Pentecostals made some very significant contributions. First of all, they rediscovered the charismata, rejecting the 'cessation theory'. According to Vinson Synan, "Historically, this is the major point made by Pentecostalism and remains the greatest accomplishment of the movement. All other contributions have been minor in comparison to this one"²⁹. Secondly, the Pentecostals brought renewal of expressive worship. Paul Bilheimer credits the Pentecostals' "massive praise" for the massive growth of the movement. He is of the view that this praise is nothing short of heavenly and something that all christians of any denomination could and should practise³⁰. And thirdly, the Pentecostals practise 'concert' and spontaneous prayers in their worship services which have been found to be highly meaningful in the life of the worshippers. 'Concert' prayer means praying together loudly of the whole congregation.

The purpose of the ministry to the saints is to build a community in the image of Jesus Christ. It is believed that in fulfilling the ministry to the saints, the Church should minister to the whole man—body, soul and spirit. However, it is also believed that primarily it is to the inner man that the

Church must minister, for this is the essential being of men³¹. This dichotomising of humans seems to be unfair. One is a human being only when the body and soul/spirit are together, and therefore no part should be given more importance over the other part, when we think of our mission.

The ministry to the world is primarily preaching the Gospel and winning of souls to Jesus Christ. Other activities such as educational, philanthropical and medical are undertaken, but they are most often undertaken as means to converting people. There is no doubt that the Church is commissioned to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus (Luke 24:47). But we should rethink undertaking of other activities like medical care etc., as means to evangelism. They should be undertaken because we are called not only to preach but also to serve all human beings.

In the context of the ministry of the world, it may be mentioned here to the credit of the Pentecostals that they have shown more cultural adaptability than any one else. It is pointed out that they have sensed the differences between theology and culture and generally have been successful in creating indigenous churches which incorporate unique local cultural forms³². It is further noted that:

Pentecostalism has appeared in cultural settings that range from high pontifical masses in St. Peters in Rome to African outdoor services that meet under trees where the faithful dance before the Lord, to the rhythmic throb of African drums³³.

F. The unity of the Church

The last article of the 'Statement of Truth', adopted by the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America reads as follows: 'We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ'³⁴. All classical Pentecostals believe that there is only one body (Ephesians 4:4), and that all believers are one in Christ. But they are of the opinion that this oneness does not require the sameness of manifestations, methods or organization. They acknowledge that Jesus teaches oneness (John 15), but each branch has its individuality. They presume that God's plan is for unity but not necessarily uniformity³⁵. There are some who

reasonably argue that pentecostalism is the most ecumenical force in the world today. According to Vinson Synan:

In the past two decades the most ecumenical force in the world has been the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. I speak here of actual grass-roots ecumenical worship and fellowship that has been experienced by literally millions of Christians of practically all denominations³⁶.

Cecil M. Robeck Jr. expresses the idea that the pentecostal movement began with a basic commitment to the Apostolic faith, and a fundamental ecumenical optimism³⁷. But, he also points out some lamentable development with regard to the ecumenical outlook. He says:

Within a few short years, however, the dominance of certain personalities, the wide cultural and theological diversity of the movement, its responses to what might be termed "persecution", and its newly-forming alliances, would work together to mask the validity of the second half of this assertion³⁸.

Relationship with other churches

Even though there was so much ecumenical optimism in the beginning, once a separate identity was established, most Pentecostals began to identify other churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church, with great Babylon mentioned in the book of Revelation 17³⁹. Most pentecostal commentaries on the Apocalypse come down so heavily on the Roman Catholic Church. In M. H. Duncan's view:

She is called 'the great whore', which speaks of her impurity in doctrines and practices. Romanism professes to be the sole spotless Bride of Christ, but in reality she is the 'mother of harlots and abomination of the earth'...⁴⁰.

There is a widespread belief among the Pentecostals that the second beast mentioned in Revelation 13:11-17 would be a religious head and they identify the Pope with this beast. Pathetically here the Pentecostals have, no doubt, been influenced by Martin Luther.

However, in the recent past, there has been some refreshing change in this attitude to the Roman Catholic Church. Since 1969-70, there has been a series of dialogues between individual members of the pentecostal churches and the Vatican

Secretariat for promoting Christian Unity. The aim of these dialogues is to come together in prayer and common witness; to share prayer, spirituality and theological reflection⁴¹. But it is lamentable to note that most Pentecostals are unaware of these dialogues and of those who know, most are antagonistic⁴².

Ever since the World Council of Churches was constituted, the general pentecostal attitude to it has remained negative. It is often seen as a sign of the end time, a universal Church, "allied with the Antichrist"⁴³. The Assemblies of God has a ten-point document on why it rejects the W. C. C.⁴⁴. Some of the serious problems it mentions are that the W. C. C. has at no time unequivocally stated its belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, his virgin birth, his sinless life, his bodily resurrection, in our regeneration etc. They consider the W. C. C. not only as 'liberal' but also as 'communist'⁴⁵.

The General Assembly of the Preachers of the Assembleias de Deus (Brazil) declared in 1963 that ecumenism represented by the W. C. C. and Vatican has a tendency towards apostasy. They affirmed that fellowship with the Roman Catholics and the W. C. C. would be impossible for a Pentecostal⁴⁶.

It should, however, be noted that braving serious criticisms from other pentecostal churches, the Pentecostal Church in Chile and the Disciples of Christ in Venezuela joined the W. C. C. in 1961⁴⁷. Donald Gee of the British Assemblies of God is of the view that the work of the W. C. C. is in accordance with the prayer of our Lord, "that they all may be one..."⁴⁸. There are churches like the Swiss Free Christian Church which feel that co-operation is possible if the other churches renounce infant baptism and introduce a New Testament church order on the pattern of I Corinthians 12-14⁴⁹.

The negative attitude of the Pentecostals to other churches stems basically from misunderstanding and fear. One notices a great amount of misunderstanding with regard to the W. C. C. Just to mention one example, the Pentecostals think that the W. C. C. does not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. But the New Delhi (1961) formulation of the W. C. C. constitution clearly says, "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures..."⁵⁰.

Besides, the Pentecostals are afraid that if they become open to co-operation with other churches, they will have to compromise different aspects of their faith. They fear theology of more 'liberal' Christianity because they are not highly trained theologically; they apprehend formalism among more liturgical communions; and they distrust the main churches because of the persecution they suffered from the main churches. The Pentecostals, however, need once again to become truly "pentecostal", closing themselves off from compromises in their contacts, but opening themselves afresh to changes which are truly mandated by the Gospel⁵¹.

I foresee a great possibility in the words of Thomas F. Zimmerman who led the world pentecostal movement for many years as the Chairman of the World Pentecostal Conference. He has the following to say about co-operation between the Pentecostals and the Evangelicals:

Though doctrinal differences exist among Evangelicals, Pentecostals seek to function co-operatively because Scripture teaches us to maintain the unity of the Spirit until we all come to the unity of the faith. We hold that truths that unite us are far greater than those over which differences exist. In honest effort to honour the lordship of Christ, and in recognition of the task of reaching a lost world, Pentecostals want to co-operate with every member of the body of Christ to bring glory to God⁵².

Even though Zimmerman here speaks of evangelicals and Pentecostals, the reasons he brings forth are truly valid for having co-operation with all Christians. After all, if confessing the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the mark of a Christian, is not every christian an evangelical?

Conclusion

The foregoing investigation brings to light a number of promising and challenging features of pentecostal ecclesiology along with the main problems it faces. It is with profound appreciation one notes the growing awareness among the mainline churches for taking seriously the positive features of the pentecostal movement. There is no doubt that the charismatic movement which brought more life to worship services in the mainline churches contributed much in developing this positive attitude. The

established churches will do well if they will draw out lessons from the pentecostal ecclesiology in reforming their ecclesiologies. I would consider the autonomy of the local churches, the place of the charismata in the life and worship of the church, expressive worship, concert and spontaneous prayers and cultural adaptability as the most promising and challenging aspects of pentecostal ecclesiology.

The Pentecostal Churches will do well if they will seriously treat the problems that are involved in their ecclesiology. The pentecostal understanding of the ministry demands very serious deliberations. And while on the one hand they believe that the primary mission of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel, on the other hand they should also understand that we are also called to serve all human beings. Further, they should not continue with their negative attitude towards other churches. They should rather become aware that they are called to make a creative contribution to the universal church at large. They can better influence the other churches with their pentecostal peculiarities by being open to and co-operative with them. The Holy Spirit who came upon the followers of Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) is not only a Spirit who brings spiritual unity, but also one who creates a community of believers (Acts 2:42-47), whose unity transcends mere spiritual unity and extends even to sharing one's possessions with the needy.

Faith Theological Seminary
Manakala, Kerala - 691551

P. B. Thomas

Foot Notes

- 1 Horton Davies, "Pentecostalism: Threat or Promise?", *The Expository Times*, 76 (March 1965) p.197.
- 2 Robert Mapes Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 11, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p.229.
- 3 Vinson Synan, "Pentecostalism, Varieties and Contributions", *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 9 (Fall, 1986), p. 43.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.
- 5 Russel P. Spittler, "The Theological Opportunity Lying Before

- the Pentecostal Movement", *Aspects of Pentecostal - Charismatic Origins*, ed. Vinson Synan (Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos International, 1975), p. 243
- 6 Vinson Synan, 'Pentecostalism: Varieties and Contributions', p.42
- 7 Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Pentecostal Research: Problems and Promises, Forword in *A Guide to the Study of the Pentecostal Movement* by Charles Edwin Jones, vol. I: Parts I and II (Metuchen, N. J. The Scarecrow Press, Inc and The American Theological Library Association, 1983), p. vii
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. viii
- 9 William G. MacDonald, 'Pentecostal Theology: A Classical View-point', *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, ed Russel P. Spittler (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 59.
- 10 Nils Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement: Its Origin, Development and Distinctive Character* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 151
- 11 *Ibid*
- 12 L. Howard Juillerat, 'Brief History of the Church of God', a Preface to *The Book of Minutes* (Cleveland, Tenn., 1922) p 8. Cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, "The Pentecostal Movement and the World Council of Churches", *The Ecumenical Review*, 18 (July 1966), p. 313
- 13 E. S. Williams, 'Forty-Five Years of Pentecostal Revival', *Pentecostal Evangel* (19-8-1951), pp 3-4. Cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, 'The Pentecostal Movement and the World Council of Churches', p. 313
- 14 John Thomas Nichol, *Pentecostalism* (Plainfield, New Jersey: Loges International, 1966,, p 4.
- 15 Minutes of the Thirty-ninth Session of the General Council of the Assemblies of God Convened at Saint Louis, Missouri, August 20-25, 1981, with Revised Constitution and Bylaws, p. 89.
- 16 E. S. Williams, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), p. 108.
- 17 J. D. Bright, *Church of God Evangel* (28-8-1961), pp. 6f., cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London. SCM Press Ltd., 1972,, p. 431.
- 18 Nils Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement: Its Origin, Development and Distinctive Character*, p. 176
- 19 *Ibid*
- 20 *Ibid.* p. 177
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 152
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.153
- 23 E. S. Williams, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, p. 95.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 133
- 25 G. Raymond Carlson, 'The Ministry Gifts of Ephesians 4"', *Paraclete*, 17 (Spring 1983), p. 5
- 26 Claire Rindall, 'The Importance of the Pentecostal and Holiness Churches in the Ecumenical Movement', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 9 (Fall 1986), pp 57-58
- 27 Siegfried Crossmann *Stewards of God's Grace*, trans. Michael Freeman (Exeter. The Paternoster Press, 1981), p. 159

- 28 G. Raymond Carlson, 'Our Mission', *The Assemblies of God in Mission*, ed. G. Raymond Carlson et al (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1970), p. 17
- 29 Vinson Synan, 'Pentecostalism: Varieties and Contributions', p. 37.
- 30 Paul Bilheimer, *Destined for the Throne* (Fort Washington, Pa: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), pp. 128-129, cited by Vinson Synan, 'Pentecostalism: Varieties and Contributions', p. 37.
- 31 D. V. Hurst, 'Our Ministry to the Saints', *The Assemblies of God in Mission*, p. 55.
- 32 Vinson Synan, 'Pentecostalism: Varieties and Contributions', p. 41.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 34 John Thomas Nichol, *Pentecostalism*, p. 4.
- 35 E. S. Williams, *Systematic Theology*, vol.3 p.111.
- 36 Vinson Synan, 'Pentecostalism: Varieties and Contributions', p. 45.
- 37 Cecil M. Robeck Jr., 'Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith: Implications for Ecumenism', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 9 (Fall 1986) p. 61.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 430.
- 40 M. H. Duncan, *A Revelation of End Time Babylon: A Verse by Verse Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Edgemont, South Dakota: M. H. Duncan 1950), p. 217, cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 436.
- 41 Basil Meeking, 'The Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogues: Editorials' *One in Christ*, 10 (No. 2, 1974), p. 106.
- 42 Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 437.
- 43 Editorial in the *Pentecostal Evangel* (8-11-1947), cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, 'The Pentecostal Movement and the World Council of Churches', p. 316.
- 44 The full text is found in Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, pp. 516-517.
- 45 *Pentecostal Evangel* (20-3-1960, 13-2-1966), cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 42.
- 46 A. P. dos Santos, *Mensagem da paz*, 33/2, (Feb. 1963), p. 8, cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 81.
- 47 Brother Jeffrey Gross, FSC, 'Confessing the Apostolic Faith from the Perspective of the Pentecostal Churches', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 9 (Spring 1987), p. 6.
- 48 Donald Gee, 'Amsterdam and Pentecost', *Pentecost*, 6 (1948), p. 17, cited by Walter J. Hollenweger, 'The Pentecostal Movement and the World Council of Churches', p. 319.
- 49 Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, p. 430.
- 50 *The New Delhi Report, The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961* (New York: Association Press, 1962) p. 152, cited by Claire Randall, 'The Importance of the Pentecostal and Holiness Churches in the Ecumenical Movement', p. 51.
- 51 Cecil M. Robeck Jr., 'Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith: Implications for Ecumenism' pp. 69-71.
- 52 Thomas F. Zimmerman, 'Priorities and Beliefs of Pentecostals', *Christianity Today*, 25 (September 4, 1981), p. 37.

The Methodist Church in India: Some Ecclesiological Challenges

One day a group of Methodists were among those who were accompanying Mahatma Gandhi on his morning walk. "So you are Methodists", the Mahatma addressed them. "John Wesley would hardly recognize you today, would he?"¹ Was Gandhiji right? We shall try, in this all too brief essay, to see. We shall be concerned both with the doctrines and structures of the church, but also with its *rasa*, or flavour, which in the case of Methodism is equally, or perhaps even more indicative of the self-understanding of the church. Is not self-understanding, after all, what ecclesiology is all about? Our attempt will be to describe some of the experiences in the origins and development of Methodism, with special reference to its embodiment in the Methodist Church in India (M. C. I.), which highlight some questions of tradition (inheritance) and context (the demands of our time). In other words, our approach will be rather more inductive than deductive – constantly asking what understandings of the church are emerging rather than working with ready made doctrinal or theological positions. Indeed, lacking a clearly articulated systematic ecclesiology, the story of the development of Methodism provides significant discernment concerning how Methodism understands itself. This is important also, of course, because it was as the result of the work in India of the Methodist Episcopal Church [U. S. A.] and its successors that there is the Methodist Church in India today. Hence, our approach will be significantly historical. Indeed all Christian communities are formed by the church of history. Tradition has been important to every branch of the church. Our roots nourish us and provide strong stock for plant, leaf and flower.

To be sure, the method which we propose has its limitations. First, it will not be possible to cover all the significant

areas of experience in which critical questions regarding the church are being raised. We shall have to be selective. Second, it would be highly presumptuous of a single individual to make a critical assessment of the Methodist Church in India, and hence we shall be limited to particular issues raised by the church itself. This obviously means that not all important issues will be raised.

Methodism and the Methodist Church in India

Origins and character of Methodism

In a very real sense it is true to say that Methodism did not begin in the 18th century, any more than Protestantism began with the Reformation. The name was first used in a religious sense in that century, but that is a very different matter. Methodism, like Protestantism, is as old as Christianity. But sometimes certain essential truths have been forgotten, submerged, distorted or suppressed. It was the task of Martin Luther and other great reformers to bring some of these truths to light again. A similar task fell to the lot of John Wesley and the Methodists. Methodism did not find a permanent embodiment until the 18th century in England, where we find John Wesley, a rather donnish — after all he was an Oxford don for many years — Anglican clergyman of unimpeachable orthodoxy, great strictness of life and an overmastering sense of duty. So Wesley might have remained all his life, if his sense of duty had not driven him out as a missionary to the newly founded American colony of Georgia. The 'Holy Club' in Oxford, over which he presided until he left Oxford for his missionary labours in the New World, was a group of rather prim young men who generally disapproved of the manner of life of their fellow undergraduates, devoted themselves to Bible study and 'good works', and sedulously attended the sacramental services of the Church of England. They were not Methodists, however, in anything but name. In fact, they constituted a student variant of the Religious Societies which were then fairly common in the more serious circles of the church. When Wesley arrived in Georgia he discovered that the rules of the 'Holy Club' were not suitable, or acceptable, to the mixed body of colonists — some of them former occupants of London's debtor prisons; and more impor-

tant, he discovered that his personal religion, adequate enough for the rarefied air of Oxford, was incapable of coping with his own emotional disturbances in a strange environment. He returned to England a failure, and did not attempt to conceal the fact from himself or his friends.

At this point the Moravians exercised a decisive influence on his spiritual development. He had, of course, met them on the way to Georgia — that is to say, on a ship tossed by Atlantic storms — and in Georgia, and had been immensely impressed by their simple faith and courage in all circumstances. He now turned in his distress to some of them who were staying in England. These men urged on him that even for an intellectual like himself the essence of Christian faith lay in simple reliance on the grace and mercy of God. Wesley had certainly believed all his life in the doctrine of justification by faith alone; but he now saw that he had lived as if something quite different were true — that a person is saved by the earnestness and thoroughness of his/her moral achievements. His theory and practice had been completely opposed to each other; hence the inner tension, the constant struggle to satisfy himself that God was well pleased with John Wesley's noble efforts to reform society. It was the Moravians who now brought him to the point of decision on the historic evening of 24 May 1738. In his own account of that occasion he writes: "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."² In other words, he now at last appropriated what he had always believed. What he had sincerely preached to others now came home to him. The struggle for self-justification was over. Previously what had been a matter of his head and his will now embraced his whole self.

John Wesley did not become a Moravian; but they gave him something which Anglicanism, at least in that century, could never have given him, and he never ceased to take from them ideas and practices which he believed to be valuable. There was also more than a trace of Puritanism in his make-up. The relation of the Anglican, Puritan and Moravian influences in the thought and practice of Methodism is a fascinating

problem, perhaps impossible of universally acceptable resolution. But it will not do to disregard any of them in trying to understand Methodism.

Wesley was now a liberated man. He swept up and down England with his newly-realized Gospel; and in his wake there sprung up groups of closely organized converts, many of them redeemed from serious personal and social evil practices, all of them awakened to a vital understanding of what had previously been mere words and rites. He was not alone in the enterprise. His first and greatest helper was, of course, his brother Charles, who had experienced a release similar to John's a few days earlier. But there were many other helpers, some of them learned churchmen and scholars, some of them moderately well educated members of the middle class, many of them from the working classes, with a sprinkling of former beggars and thieves; nearly all of them forced to show their mettle in the face of mob opposition and educated contempt. But the controlling mind from the earliest days was John Wesley's. It was he who articulated the doctrine, the discipline, the strategy, and the organization, while others carried out his wishes.

It is also useful to enquire about the system of ideas and practices which the driving force of Wesley's personality brought into operation in the minds and lives of the Methodist people; here lie the seeds of Methodist ecclesiology. He was not a creative theologian, but he was a highly systematic one; and he was an organizer of undisputed genius.

In the first place, Wesley was a completely Orthodox Protestant Christian; in fact he was a great deal more orthodox than many eighteenth-century bishops and other theologians, and in an important sense can be said to have saved the orthodoxy of the church for itself and for the world by making it a creative force in the lives of so many thousands of people. He believed and preached and taught the whole Christian faith of the Bible and the Creeds. He had great respect for the wisdom of the Church Fathers, though he subordinated them to the teaching of the Scripture. He was unswerving in his devotion to the Sacraments of the Church of England and insisted on their regular and sincere observance. All his life he regarded the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* highly, and he treasured

all the ordinances of the Church of England, which he believed to be the 'best-constituted Church in Christendom'. He held what in his day was counted as a 'high' doctrine of the church, although he came to think of the Apostolic Succession as a 'fable'.

Within the context of his comprehensive Protestant orthodoxy he laid particular emphasis on certain tenets of the faith, because he held them to be both neglected by the church of his time and extremely relevant to the needs of the people around him. These tenets were all related to what he called 'the way to heaven'. To find and to follow this 'way' was the fundamental need of every person and to point it out to sinful humanity was the urgent responsibility of every Christian preacher. Above everything else that he ever taught, Wesley stressed the free grace of God, available for every human being. Wesley himself sums up the matter thus: "All the blessings which God has bestowed upon men are of his mere grace, bounty and favour: his free undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved; man having no claim to the least of his mercies"³.

But what Wesley — paradoxically, perhaps, in our eyes — believed to be at the very centre and soul of what he had been especially called by God to proclaim about the Christian life was the doctrine of Christian Perfection. That is, he taught in season and out of season, that every Christian begins to be 'sanctified, made holy, by the Holy Spirit as soon as his/her sins are forgiven, and that this process continues until, quite possibly in this life, and certainly, if not, in the next, until s/he is wholly cleansed from inward as well as outward sin, and loves God and neighbour perfectly. It may be that Wesley outruns his biblical authorities at some points in his statement of this doctrine, as when he claims that a person ceases from outward sin as soon as s/he is forgiven by God. But on the main issue Wesley represents the teaching of our Lord himself, who in all his teaching set the standard of moral and spiritual perfection before his followers and expected them by the grace of God to attain it.

These are the doctrines within the corpus of Christian faith which Wesley rescued from the obscurity into which they had fallen, and proclaimed far and wide. He performed the same service to an element in the pattern of Christian living

which had also fallen into disuse: the practice of Christian fellowship. This is by now a supremely vague term, whose meaning is frequently understood in terms of social intercourse, but it means the sharing in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit which is the privilege of all Christians and binds them together into an indissoluble unity. Wesley conceived this fellowship in a global sense. This is abundantly evident from his oft-quoted assertion, "The world is my parish", as from his relations with Christians of other communions than his own, and from his sermon 'On the Catholic Spirit', where he says that every Christian is a brother [and sister] in Christ to any believer in Jesus, the Christ, whatever his/her theology or liturgy or taste in ecclesiastical polity. But he also actualized it in his own Society. Every Methodist belonged not only to the local 'society' of 'the people called Methodists', but also to a 'class' or a 'band', within that society, that is to a group of about twelve people under a layperson as leader, who met regularly to talk about spiritual matters in an intimate and personal way, and were committed to mutual responsibility and concern in good times and bad times alike. It may be that some odd things sometimes happened at these gatherings, and it is certainly true that they came to suffer in later years from the disease of excessive introspection; but they gave to the local Methodist 'societies', and to the Methodist Society as a whole, a cohesion, a sense of belonging to one another, which was reminiscent of New Testament Christianity. They turned the Methodist movement from a collection of individuals 'plucked from the burning' into an organism which neither social ostracism, nor later on, worldly wealth and prestige were able to disrupt. The outward sign of the organic nature of Methodism was the highly efficient organization and discipline which Wesley worked out, by a series of inspired improvisations. But that organization and discipline could not have survived, or even outlived its inventor, if it had not been grounded in a deep inner unity.

But what was the impact of this dynamic movement on 'official Christianity', historically not always the first to recognize a new activity of the Holy Spirit? Among the higher reaches of the clergy there was horror, consternation, contempt and hostility, changing gradually to reluctant admiration ming-

led with disapproval of the methods employed. Among the lower clergy there was often jealousy, and fear of consequences of giving the proletarians ideas above their station, but there was also a measure of sympathy and goodwill, and sometimes active co-operation. Encouraged by such support as he received, and unperturbed by the weight of opposition, Wesley went steadily on his way preaching, teaching, writing incessantly, building up his organization, and sturdily maintaining through thick and thin that the idea of separation from the Church of England was wholly out of the question. However, a few years after his 'evangelical conversion' Wesley had become convinced that according to the New Testament there was only one order of ministry, that of presbyters, to which he himself belonged. Therefore, he had a perfect right to ordain others for ministry. For nearly forty years Wesley hesitated to use this right, for fear of precipitating the schism which he wanted at all costs to avoid. But in the end he ordained two men to the ministry for work in America, lest after the War of Independence there be no one in that vast country to administer the sacraments, now that the Anglican priests had withdrawn, and the Bishop of London had refused to ordain a Methodist to cross the Atlantic. After that fateful act, Wesley ordained a few other men for Scotland, and even some for England. Still he fondly believed that the Methodists were inside the Church of England.

Wesley's death broke the strong and solitary link that bound the Methodists to their mother church. It took place in 1791, and by 1793 the Methodists were organized into a church which was wholly separate from the Church of England. Wesley had built more wisely than he knew, or had dared to believe. His organization was so compact, the Methodist organism cohered so vitally, the Gospel he preached was so catholic, that the Methodist Society became, almost overnight, the Methodist Church, complete with the preaching of the Gospel, administration of the Sacraments of the Gospel, exercise of the discipline of the Gospel and a ministry to preach, celebrate and care for the flock of God.

The history of Methodism in England in the nineteenth century was in a distinctly lower key than it had been in the eighteenth. But elsewhere in the English-speaking world and

far beyond it this was by no means the case. Francis Asbury was to America what Wesley was to England. Thomas Coke followed to assist him, armed with the commission of Wesley to act as 'Superintendent' of the Methodists in America. Much to Wesley's chagrin, Coke called himself 'bishop' and consecrated Asbury to the same office. Thus, the Methodist Church in the United States has been episcopal almost from the start, though there is no claim to Apostolic Succession. It is frequently suggested that the bishops of the American Methodist Church have, in fact, more episcopal authority than an Anglican bishop or the British Methodist Conference. Under Asbury's guiding hand the Methodist movement spread like wildfire in America.

Methodism in India

The American Methodists were slow starters in overseas missionary endeavours, largely because their energies went at first to the rapid expansion which was taking place in North America itself. It was not until the year 1856 that the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had been actively searching for half a decade, finally found a volunteer to begin its work in India. In that year William Butler, having been given wide discretionary powers both in his work and the selection of a location began work at Bareilly, in what is now the state of U. P. Prior to his departure for India Butler had been advised to "lay broad and wide foundations in India". From the very beginning major emphasis was laid on evangelistic and educational work.

Two notable events for Indian Methodism occurred in 1870. That year marked the arrival of the first missionaries of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. One was Isabella Thoburn, who began educational work among women and girls and later founded the first college for women in Asia; the other, Clara Swain, the first woman medical missionary and founder of the first hospital for women in Asia. It was fitting that the first women missionaries should have come to India, for two women from India — Mrs. Clementina Butler and Mrs. Lois Parker — were influential in starting the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the American church in 1869. Subsequently, the efforts of women who were unsatis-

fied by the slight progress made by women in the upper echelons of the church were reflected not only in the acquisition of full clergy rights in the Methodist Church, but also in the relative independence of the new Woman's Division of Christian Service at the time of the union of Methodist churches in the U. S. A. in 1939. By this time the boards of most women's mission organizations in other denominations had been absorbed into general, male-dominated boards. Indeed, a remarkable characteristic of the work, not only in India, has been the successful work among women. The women then, as women today, had to overcome many prejudices and handicaps. The great Alexander Duff has often been quoted as remarking that "you might as well attempt to lift the loftiest peak in the Himalayas and throw it into the Bay of Bengal as attempt the education of Indian girls"⁴. The many restraints placed on women in Indian society may have lent some substance to this remark, but it remained for Isabella Thoburn, among many others, to disprove it. Through education, medicine, and evangelism women worked for the upliftment of their sisters.

Women in the M. C. I.

The women of the Methodist Church in India received a strong heritage from their sisters in the U. S. A. This concern for women has not only resulted in various services being available to them, but has also enriched the M. C. I.'s own life with such contributions. Indeed, women's representation in the decision making bodies of the M. C. I., from the local, pastorate conference to the highest, General Conference is by Disciplinary requirement 1/3. Further, the Women's Society for Christian Service is a very active element in the church, providing strong leadership of laywomen.

The M. C. I. has a structure for full time women's ministry, called the Deaconesses Conference. Significantly, it was a memorial from the Bengal Conference to the General Conference of 1888 that resulted in the founding of a deaconess movement in Methodism. Membership in the Deaconess Conference is open to those women who have been trained as deaconesses (about 15% of them have theological degrees). Most deaconesses are single, but married women are not barred

from membership, as long as they agree to be under the bishop's appointment. The wife of the resident bishop is the President of the Regional Deaconesses' Conference. Deaconesses are appointed by the bishop to positions of: evangelists, principals of church schools, hostel superintendents etc. Deaconesses are commissioned, rather than ordained. Since 1985, they have full voting rights with the clergy in the Regional Conference, the basic unit of the M. C. I. After women were given voting rights in the General Conference of the Methodist Church in the USA in 1904, there was no serious opposition to the ordination of women in the church. However, probably because the church has this order, women prefer to become deaconesses, rather than to seek ordination. There is also considerable apprehension concerning the acceptance of ordained women by the local congregations. At present there are c.100 deaconesses under appointment by bishops either in work or in various probationary or training stages.

There had been locally ordained women in the Methodist Church, USA, from the beginning of the century, but in 1956, the General Conference took a definite stand to ordain women, and to appoint them as full pastors and full members of the Annual Conference. The United Methodist Church, U.S.A.(U.M.C.) of which the Indian Methodists were a part until 1981, encouraged women to play a prominent role in the ordained ministry. Though ordination has been a possibility in India too since 1956, in fact only a very few women have sought ordination, nor has it been actively encouraged, as indicated by the fact that there are currently only 4 ordained women in active service in the congregational ministry of the M.C.I., a church of c.600,000 members. It appears that ordination for women may move ahead very slowly in future. Though there is no legal impediment, resistance from the congregations, plus apathy on the part of the women themselves mean that there is not much pressure for change from within the church.

Geographical expansion

If the coming of the first women missionaries in 1870 broadened the social range of Indian Methodism, the other notable event of that same year, the coming of William Taylor to India, was responsible for broadening the geographical range.

It is widely claimed that Taylor was one of the most effective evangelists of his century. His career was fabulous. First of all, he was a 'home missionary' in California, where to the rough goldminers he was known as "Father Taylor" and subsequently throughout the world as "California Taylor". His missions took him all over North America, to Britain, to Australia, to South Africa, to Ceylon and to India. Here he spent four years and left suddenly to join the Moody and Sankey revival meetings in England. Later he established a line of work around the coast of South America. Finally he was elected Bishop of Africa and spent a decade or more in the heart of that continent.

William Taylor, thus, had an important part in the development of many of the 'mission fields' of the Methodist Church. Though his policies were not always sound, he did not in good Methodist fashion hesitate to think and act in strategic terms. Taylor began his work in the territory of North India where the first Methodist missionary activity was initiated. In this area he was only moderately successful, though he did revive the church considerably. In the process the conviction grew on him that Methodism had as much right and reason to bear its witness throughout the whole country as did any other denomination. This, of course, in the thinking of some would constitute a violation of comity agreements. There was, however, fierce debate against Taylor's position by those Methodists, for whom William Butler was the foremost spokesperson, who felt the work would be more effective if concentrated in a smaller territory. In his views Taylor had a powerful ally in James M. Thoburn, who not only supported but indeed joined him in his extension programme.

"Mass movements"

The M. C. I. has emphasized some aspects of mission endeavour more than others, but it has been generally wide in its scope from the beginning, nor was it limited to any group of persons. However, the church was early "led" into an evangelistic programme in the villages of North India that resulted in the baptism of large numbers of persons from among the so-called "depressed classes". During the two decades from 1904-24, the Methodist Church claims that it was responsible for bap-

tizing six hundred thousand persons from the "depressed classes". Commenting on this, the M. C. I. goes on to assert:

... but even so we have been able to receive only a fraction of those who were willing to be baptized and throw in their lot with Christianity. In this mass movement work God has granted to our Church a very large place of leadership, but the opportunities demand of us larger resources, more missionaries and Indian evangelists, a more adequate educational work in the villages and a more consistent and vigorous policy⁶.

There should have been, however, a prior concern related to these developments for, as Kenneth Scott Latourette perceptively observed, the "mass movements" were "at once the opportunity, the glory, and the acute problem of the church in India"⁷. There were those who were greatly concerned about the question of motivation, which was often perceived as not being sufficiently spiritual, but rather a mixture of the spiritual, the economic and the social. At the same time there seems to have been insufficient attention to the problem of adequate instruction and pastoral care. In this regard, a pioneer missionary, the Rev. P. M. Buck had the following to say:

Perhaps the chief peril that faces us is an unchristianized Christianity. Multitudes await the nominal acceptance of the Gospel; but to win them to the real life that is in Christ and to nourish them up into the full stature of manhood is a very different matter. The number reaching the new life that the Spirit imparts must determine all worthy success⁸.

Efforts, however woefully inadequate, were expended to give pastoral care and train workers to such a task. Nor has this been an issue for the Methodist Church alone. The fact that today between 60-75% of the membership of Protestant churches is made up of persons from Scheduled Caste background⁹ is an indication of the effect these "mass movements" had on the caste character of the churches, including the Methodist Church.

New departures

Consistent with the spirit of the movement, evident from its earliest beginnings, Methodism in India has always been

innovative. New departures were undertaken in response to needs which arose. For example, the District Conference, an intermediate ecclesial structure between the local Pastorate and the Regional Conferences, was originated in North India. Since some districts were fairly widely separated from others and had peculiar problems, and since district-workers required periods of careful instruction, the District Conference was devised first of all in 1862 to meet the need. It has spread throughout Methodism.

Likewise, the Central Conference originated in India. With the spread of Methodism throughout much of the country under William Taylor, some device of co-ordination and mutual counsel was necessary. Such a joint conference was first held in Allahabad in 1881. It was approved by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1884 and was soon afterwards instituted in other parts of the world. It afforded a pattern for the Jurisdictional Conference in the reunion of North American Methodism in 1939.

From the very beginning leadership by Indians was promoted. At an early date Indians were made annual conference members. Soon Indian district superintendents appeared, and as early as 1930 the Central Conference of Southern Asia elected J. R. Chitambar as the first Indian bishop, marking the beginning of a new era. Indeed, to give the "Indian spirit and genius the best possible opportunity of expressing itself", at least in church administration and leadership, has been and continues to be a definite policy of the Methodist Church¹⁰. This has been a result of the specific aim not to perpetuate a mission, but to establish a church. Success in this matter is plainly evident in the fact that there never existed in the Methodist Church the kind of 'mission' and 'church' dichotomy, with overseas missionaries belonging to the 'mission' and Indians belonging to the 'church'.

Nor were overseas missionaries the only ones concerned with mission. Early on Indian Methodism was seized with a vision of the need and possibility of organizing a society in order to carry on missionary work within the subcontinent by means of an indigenous agency and the use of funds collected within the country. This resulted in bringing into exis-

tance the *Desi* Missionary Society organized so as to include all the Conferences, which functioned on a somewhat ad hoc basis. In 1920 the Methodist Missionary Society, directed by a board composed entirely of Indian men and women came into existence. Rev. W. H. Soule was appointed the first missionary and sent to Bhabua, Bihar. Less than two decades later Rev. & Mrs. I. B. Kristmukti from Gujarat were commissioned as missionaries to work among the Gujarati community in what was then Southern Rhodesia. The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church in India — the successor body continues to give practical expression to the missionary vocation of the M. C. I.

Ecumenical co-operation and church union

During recent years the Methodist record for ecumenical co-operation in India has been good. It is safe to say that there is hardly a united Christian effort of any kind within the area of its responsibility in which the Methodist Church is not bearing its full share. It has, however, not always been so. While William Butler preferred concentration in North India, Taylor and Thoburn were unrepentant Methodist expansionists. The latter thought not of a mission in India but for India. This was often understood by others as disregard of the principle of comity. As can be easily imagined, Taylor's views did not sit well with the leaders of other denominations and churches.

Gradually, however, denominational rivalry gave way to co-operation and friendly consultation. Beginning in 1862 large Protestant interdenominational missionary conferences were held in various cities every ten years. There is no gainsaying that incentives from within and pressures from without joined to hasten the co-operative process. The foolishness of rivalry when many areas were "unoccupied", the unnecessary expense of duplication, the sense of the "sin of disunity" all encouraged closer working together. Representatives of the various denominations and churches discovered a measure of oneness in action. There was/is a common task in common obedience to One Lord, what John Mackay has called the "unity of the road", citing the prophet Amos' observation, "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?"¹¹

One certainly does not need to remind the reader of the

many and significant accomplishments toward Christian unity in our land. Indeed, with the inauguration of the Church of South India in September of that year the year 1947 is as much a landmark for the church in India as it is for the nation. Regrettably, the Methodist Church has not been part of these remarkable accomplishments. For a variety of reasons, among which must be accounted serious theological/ecclesiastical issues such as non-episcopal ordination as well as decisive 'non-theological/non-ecclesiological' factors such as episcopal emoluments, Methodist Church in Southern Asia, except for a brief period of consultation, never actively negotiated for participation in the Church of South India.

Since 1928 the Methodist Church in Southern Asia was engaged in negotiations with other churches in North India to enter into organic union. By 1966 the fourth and finally agreed upon *Plan of Church Union in North India* was prepared. This plan was commended to the Annual Conferences of the M.C.S.A. by the Central Conference in 1968. The Annual Conferences accepted the Plan by more than the required two-thirds majority. In that same year the Central Conference of the M.C.S.A. informed the General Conference of the U.M.C., U.S.A., of the affirmative action of the M.C.S.A. and requested official permission to sever its constitutional relationship with the United Methodist Church and join with the other churches which were to form the Church of North India. The proposal of the M.C.S.A. was accepted and everything was now ready for the M.C.S.A. to join in the formation of the C.N.I. However, once again, theologically insignificant but existentially pressing factors brought a call by the existing, and aspiring, episcopal leadership of the M. C. S. A. for a Special Session of the Central Conference in 1970. This time the vote was against the Plan of Union. The Methodist Church in Southern Asia was now in a somewhat anomalous position. It was no longer part of the United Methodist Church, U. S. A., having had this relationship severed in 1968, and it also was not a part of the Church of North India, which was inaugurated in 1970. The Methodist Church in Southern Asia was, from a legal/constitutional point of view, in actual fact not a church at all.

Hasty efforts to rectify this untenable situation resulted in a ruling by the Judicial Council and subsequent appointment

by the Central Conference of 1972 of a committee to continue conversation with the newly formed Church of North India. These negotiations did not bear any fruit, however, because the C. N. I. was already being governed by its new constitution, following its adoption at the time of Union in 1970.

The Methodist Church in India

After a good deal of soul searching and strategizing, the Central Conference of 1976 resolved to consider a new relationship with the United Methodist Church, U. S. A., that of an "affiliated autonomous" Methodist Church in India. A draft Constitution and a draft Plan of the new church were prepared by the Committee on the Structure of Methodism and Church Union. The Methodist Church in India was inaugurated at the meeting of the Central Conference held in January 1981 in Madras. Accordingly, the Methodist Church in India became a self-governing church in whose establishment the United Methodist Church, U. S. A. had assisted and with which the M. C. I. continues to cooperate through the Board of Global Ministries of the U. M. C.

The establishment of the Methodist Church in India as an "affiliated autonomous" church in relation to the United Methodist Church, U.S.A. is seen by the M.C.I. as ushering in a "new era for Indian Methodism". There began the travail of coming to terms with a new identity and status as an independent church rooted in India yet belonging to the church universal. Enlightened leaders of the M.C.I. insist that the church must be more serious about its ecumenical relations than Methodists have been in the past, and to that end the church at first sought a relationship with the Joint Council of the C.N.I., the C.S.I., and the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. For several reasons, primary among them being the question of apostolic succession in episcopal ordination, it was subsequently decided that the M.C.I. should seek ecumenical relations with one of the members of the Joint Council and thereby establish relations with the other two. Informal conversations are currently going on between the M.C.I. and the C.N.I. Though there is not much indication of progress, it is impossible to say what the future holds and how the Me-

thodist Church in India will respond. However, our task is not one of predicting the future.

Using an inductive approach to our concern, and in spite of the limitations noted at the very beginning of our discussion, we have attempted to highlight enough important components in the self-understanding of the Methodist Church in India to permit us to suggest some of the challenges to its self-understanding facing the M. C. I. Many forces have combined to suggest a new understanding of the community of the church in the twentieth century. We have neither the time nor the competence to describe and analyze these at present. Suffice it to say that we have learned not only from those who love the church, but also from its critics. Insights have been received from other disciplines of study, e. g., sociology. Having characterized Methodism, at the beginning of our discussion, as a movement of recovery and revival of essential but neglected elements in the life of the church it will not be surprising to find that a number of the challenges to the self-understanding of the M. C. I. come from within Methodism itself. While being acutely aware of the inadequacies of dealing in general categories, for the sake of the brevity required by the present limitations of space, we present the "challenges" in terms of some fundamental components of what may generally be understood to be an adequate ecclesiology.

Ecclesiological Challenges

An holistic ecclesiology

A basic problem with the "implied" ecclesiology of the Methodist Church in India, with its overarching concern with organizational structure, education and evangelism, would seem to be its lack of wholeness. We have seen evidence in the M. C. I. of hierarchy-oriented and bourgeois values dominant in the church, accompanied by a Christian triumphalism. A basic concern for the poor and needy as subjects rather than as objects is not obviously characteristic. Absent too from the community of Jesus is the "kenotic" or self-emptying life style which Jesus typified. Such a self-understanding can only be termed 'partial' as opposed to a holistic ecclesiology which would not only bear "right" emphases but would be undergirded by a holistic theology that is both historical and eschatological, vertical and

horizontal, personal and social, spiritual and political, and in solidarity with the poor. While agreeing with this plea, of course, the difficulty is to ensure that these checks and balances are maintained in every local manifestation of the church, for the whole process of contextual expression works with a different set of presuppositions which are geared to responding to the needs of the local context.

The related issue of the relationship between the universal and the particular is not so much a specific response to the demand for an holistic ecclesiology as it is an issue in itself — a responding to the needs of the context. In this situation we are not given the criteria for judging what is inherited, what is fundamental, and what is distinctly Indian. The criteria for these we must discover in the process of finding contextual expressions of “the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church”. The demand here is not so much to maintain what may be called “the universal characteristics of the church” but rather to be authentic manifestations of the church in a particular context. The move is away from the universal to the particular and from uniformity to plurality. The slogan, “Let a hundred flowers bloom”, can illuminate Christian understanding. What seems to be called for in working out an ecclesiology in the Indian context is what has been termed a “receptive pluralism” that permits a number of contextual expressions. Pluralism — for there will be many expressions, each authentically contextual in a particular Indian situation, whether tribal, or Muslim, or ‘dalit’ or ‘brahminical’. Receptive — so that each may not be totally self-sufficient and thus closed in, but rather open to each other to learn, to correct and be enriched. Therefore, the issue of an holistic ecclesiology should be seen not as a ready-made framework which is imposed on us, but rather as a direction in which we move. One wonders whether the M. C. I. has relied excessively on its inherited strong, ready-made framework.

An open-ended ecclesiology

“Has it been worth it?” Many Methodists, as well as members of other churches, are asking the question with regard to church union achievements — whether organic or conciliar. While the reasons for the M.C.S.A.’s non-participation in any of the church unions which have been formed in India in

the past half century have been ambiguous, it is equally true that in some instances the quest for church union can be, indeed has been ambivalent. Nevertheless, the question itself needs questioning. The very fact that it is asked at all points to the need to be clear about the motivation for seeking the church's unity. It seems to be pressed not as an end in itself, as a demand of the gospel, but rather as a means to an end — for bigger and more efficient churches, to consolidate the holding of church property, to solve some ecclesiastical problem, for the sake of a better public image} or even what might be called the "mission of the church". In some other cases, the experience of union or coming into union has been in large measure a matter of doctrinal give and take, rather than responding to the actual social, political and religious context in which the union is taking place. The church's unity is to be actively sought because we believe that unity is the will of God for the body of the Christ. It would be ridiculous for a Christian's hope, faith and love to rest on some calculation as to whether or not such qualities are worth the effort. It is no less ridiculous to attempt a cost-benefit analysis of the merits or otherwise of seeking the visible reconciliation of the Christ's fractious people. Surely obedience transcends calculation.

When rightly understood, the process of union is concerned with the renewal of the church. It is more than a merger of several churches. It is the coming into being of a new church in a particular context of time and place. With this kind of perspective, union becomes an act of trust between the churches coming together rather than a matter of doctrinal precision. It is built on mutual relationships which make possible mutual enrichment and correction. It is a commitment to openness and pilgrimage. It is a liberating process that opens up new possibilities. For example, there is evidence to suggest that in a couple of uniting churches, in Australia and Korea, the people were willing to take a bolder stance on issues of social justice than they did in their denominational churches. On the other side, the segments of the churches that stayed out of union tended to be more and more reactionary on these issues. Equally notable has been the willingness of uniting churches to explore more widely in the area of worship and be willing to experiment and borrow from other traditions.

The experience of Christian unity, therefore, seems to seek an open-ended ecclesiology where the major issues of church life, worship and witness are not necessarily solved beforehand, but are worked out in the process of becoming a church in a context. Such an experience of union is also people-oriented, rather than doctrine-centred, so that the uniting experience seems to heighten the people-centredness of its ecclesiology.

Viewed from this perspective, the challenge of union is that: 1) It brings a wider perception of what it means to belong to the church. Such belonging is more than denominational affiliation. 2) It provides the occasion for deeper commitment and mutual trust, so that as churches we borrow from and are enriched by each other rather than from abroad. 3) It provides a basis for a strategic use of resources.

In essence, union understood as church renewal provides an opportunity for local churches to share in the process of working out their obedience to the gospel in their particular context. It also provides the basis and strength for dealing with the world confessional bodies, such as the World Methodist Council, the ecclesial trans-nationals of our time, who refuse to understand or accept our particular expressions and experiences of being the church in our contexts and thus all too often devalue and even destroy the richness of the local experience and contextual manifestations of church life. From this dialogue, one fervently hopes, the Roman Catholic Church will not be excluded.

If all this be true, if the ecumenical pioneers who bequeathed the vision to us were not entirely misled, then it becomes a matter of urgency to return the unity issue to a high place on the agenda of our churches and ecumenical organizations. This is true not only of the Methodist Church in India.

A communitarian ecclesiology

While there is no doubt that the early Wesleyan Methodist "societies" and "classes" had some drawbacks, which we have already alluded to, there was much of value in them which could well be recovered for the enrichment and strengthening of the life of the church. Certainly, the community of Jesus should be quite different from any other group in the society. It should be what the American black writer, James Baldwin, described as "larger, freer and more loving".

Such a community would be noted for the openness of people towards one another and for sensitivity to the needs of others. However, if a real sharing of Christian conviction and concerns is to happen there needs to be a number of small groups where people may relate to each other not in a superficial way, as in so many other social groups, but in a trusting and caring manner.

The community of Jesus should be notable, then, as one whose members bear one another's burdens. The lonely person, the one who is neurotic or domineering, can be relaxed and accepted here. Genuine friendships can be formed. Those under strain or in trouble can find welcome and value.

However, there is another dimension needed, which has been described as 'tough loving'. People are not merely to be propped up in their weaknesses, but to be supported in their strengths and encouraged to grow towards wholeness and maturity. 'Tough loving' acknowledges and accepts people as they are; but it also assists them to become what they have to be. Such care implies a genuine understanding of God's mercy and love in the lives of the members which will issue in a wide degree of tolerance of others and honesty with them.

In the wider society, each local congregation should be a 'flower' of its culture, meeting the needs and expressing the faith of those people in that place. It should also, however, be a 'sign' to its context of the breaking in of the Kingdom of God. So as its words should have a prophetic ring its life-style also should lift and uphold in midst of the surrounding world the values of the Kingdom.

A "Laic" ecclesiology

Regardless of the representative ecclesial structure requiring a proportion of 2/3 laity and 1/3 clergy in official bodies of the church, as the Methodist Church developed, and it is certainly not alone in this, authority has taken the form of a hierarchy. This is abundantly evident in the fact that the three-fold order of ministry of the Methodist Church in India is a ranking in authority, with all ministers being perceived as different in kind from the laity. In this regard it is significant to recall that one of the several reversals which characterized Jesus' life and ministry was his reversal of the accepted

modes of authority. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you..¹²"

One may question whether such a hierarchical view of authority has any place in a new world, let alone in the community of Jesus today. Has it not more to do with inherited concepts, reinforced no doubt by the hierarchical character of Indian society, many of which are inappropriate to the Christian community? Is the model of the pyramid operating in the business world and politics at all suitable for the church?

It must be asked whether the community of Jesus is not intended to provide an alternative model of authority. If it follows the words and life of Jesus it may well stand over against ecclesiastical and societal structures and live in tension with them. It is true that many cultures, including our Indian, are dominated by class or feudal types of authority. But surely being sensitive to the context means for the church not an uncritical appropriation of these into the life of the church. Christian communities should be such that they provide both a challenge to these and an illustration of different ways of relating to one another.

Authority in the church then would arise out of the consensus of the members reflecting the spiritual quality of the women and men trusted by the community. Indeed, at present it does so, in some rare instances. But any hereditary or 'received right' must be suspect. So also any outside influence based on financial support, foreign power or tradition.

The concept of the *laos* or whole people of God is then the basis of all Christian ecclesiology. It is the redeemed and redeeming community. Those who are ordained within it are set aside for one form of serving, but it implies no inherent status. Ordination does not create a 'difference in kind'. Every member is a valued member with a distinct understanding of the mind of Christ and a unique contribution to the life of the immediate community and the wider world.

Similarly, it cannot be assumed that the aged or the young have more spiritual understanding and therefore leadership in this community. Nor can one apply other categories such as maleness [about which we shall have more to say], af-

fluence, class or race. Such factors are incidental in the body of the Christ. Every baptised person is a unique and precious member of the *laos* of God and should be encouraged to offer their gifts within it. Any other interpretation of the Gospel makes a mockery of it.

The body of the Christ must be implacable in its opposition to any teaching that denies that all are beloved children of God, called to serve God and God's people. Any doctrine or practice that uses race, age, colour, or gender as grounds for discrimination must be held to the light of the Christ's own life, teaching and action. The self-understanding of the Jesus community must be inclusive.

An inclusive ecclesiology

We have acknowledged the partial nature of the ecclesiology which the Methodist Church in India inherited and further evolved. One might be tempted to attribute this to doctrinal or theological considerations, but, in fact, it looks more like a human problem. If our ecclesiology is indeed to be people-oriented and Christ-centred, then there is need to re-examine our ecclesiology from the point of view of those who, for one reason or another, seem to be excluded from or have limited participation in the total life of the church. To do so is to work towards an ecclesiology that will neither fence some people out nor fence some others in.

The categories proposed here come to mind as being relevant to the M.C.I., though certainly are not limited to this church. Nor do we suggest that these exhaust the elements involved in an adequate understanding of ecclesiology.

a) The need for a feminist ecclesiology

We have seen the impressive inheritance of women's participation and leadership bequeathed to the M.C.I. by its received tradition and structures. This was, tragically enough, subsequently not significantly developed in the Indian context.

For Christians in many traditions it is incontrovertible that the ordained ministry must be open to women who are called and equipped to serve in it. This is seen as a fundamental matter not only of human rights but also of theological principle. Whatever may be argued about the 'old creation', in

the 'new creation' of the Christ's body, 'ancient ideas of subordination have no place. The microcosm of the church should reflect the larger purpose of God for the new humanity: that women and men are called to responsible partnership with God in renewing the creation.

Even more universal is the demand for greater participation of women in the structures and work of the church, which has been with us for some time now. In fact, however, the challenge is more than a matter of having women participating. It is to look again at the very character of the ecclesiologies we have. They are, by and large, patriarchal in orientation in that they give prominence to the role of older males. If we enquire about the qualities of leadership required of women, not only in the M. C. I. but in Indian churches as a whole, we will most frequently find that women are expected to exhibit humility/meekness, patience, self-sacrifice, service, obedience etc. Of men authority, dignity, courage, decisiveness etc. are required. Obviously, male leadership is given prominence, while subservience is required of female leaders. Ironically, in giving priority to the qualities of so-called male leadership, we not only exclude several categories of people, including women, but also undervalue precisely those qualities that are considered to be the marks of a Christian. In calling for a "feminist ecclesiology" what is being stressed is not a separate ecclesiology for women, but a self-understanding that will take seriously the qualities of Christian leadership which our Lord himself exemplified. Hence the challenge goes much further than the issue of women's participation and ordination. It is to look again at the structures of church and congregational life and the policies or thinking that undergird them.

- b) An ecclesiology based on a broader understanding of the Christ-experience

The emphasis laid by Methodism on personal experience in evangelism not only is manifest in the Wesleyan phase of the movement but continues to the present. Increasingly, however, there is appearing in India, not only in the M. C. I., a form of evangelistic preaching which arouses in people an inordinately large feeling of guilt and then attempts to assuage it with a form of 'personal salvation', what might be called a kind of

Christian 'shamanism'. We certainly are not questioning the preaching of personal salvation in evangelism, but the approach and method of some preachers who use it for personal glory and gain. There is also a genuine question concerning any form of preaching which so emphasizes the personal situation at the expense of the historical one in which we are, that it undercuts the prophetic role of the church.

While accepting this concern, there is another side to the issue which we noted in the experience of Wesley and which may need to be taken more seriously by the more 'established' churches. There are many people whose way of experiencing the supernatural is not taken seriously. For them, the experience of the Christ is not primarily an intellectual, rational experience. Rather, it is an experience of being touched by a supernatural power. Therefore, in describing the Christ-experience, which of necessity undergirds any ecclesiology, we need to recognize several levels. i) As an influx of supernatural power which influences us. This concerns particularly the non-intellectual aspects of our being where salvation is experienced largely as the receiving of blessings. ii) There is the understanding of revelation as an event which we experience and interpret. This concerns largely the rational and intellectual aspects of our being. iii) Where revelation is the unveiling of an Abiding Presence whom we experience, that we may be changed. This is the mystical experience of Jesus, the Christ. All these levels of experiencing Jesus the Christ must inform our ecclesiology.

A related concern is that of broadening the area of our belonging, particularly with regard to churches which are limited to caste, tribal or linguistic groups. There are, of course, various reasons for this, but the most common seems to be the need to express the self-identity of a particular group which is under some form of social or political restraint. A common experience or understanding of the Christ seems to hold certain natural communities together and gives them an identity vis-à-vis larger dominating communities.

While recognizing the legitimacy of this need, there is the danger that these may become closed, exclusive communities. The Christ-experience of these communities should be open to and interact with the Christ-experience of other Christian

communities, so that they may be encouraged to participate also in a larger area of belonging. Our concern is with an ecclesiology that perceives the church as an inclusive community which has all kinds of people — classes, races, genders, personalities of different types — on the way to fulfilment and sinners on the way to salvation.

c) A Kingdom-based ecclesiology

John Wesley stressed in season and out of season that the church witnesses to its Lord, Jesus the Christ, and exists as a sign of the Kingdom which is both a present reality and a future hope. Here is another element of its heritage which the M.C.I. does not seem to have developed sufficiently, for while this truth is to be found in its literature, it is not always evident in its life. Indeed, the M.C.I., along with other churches, seem to be more pre-occupied with their own problems than with the business of the Kingdom. Evidence of this is surely to be found in the entire week long meeting of the M.C.I. General Conference which took place in October 1989. It was unable even to elect two bishops, let alone consider any other concerns.

Today, the challenge to understand the church's life, witness and worship in the perspective of the Kingdom is coming in a new way from christian-action groups whose life and work is concerned with the struggle for social justice. For these communities, there are other bases besides the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Primary among these is a belief in the coming Kingdom of justice and compassion and a commitment to realizing it in history through a process of confrontation and change. In having this basis and translating it into action, these groups do not work alone. They are involved with people of faith in other religious traditions and with people of no traditional faith, but who share a common ideological commitment.

A Kingdom-based understanding of their existence and an involvement with peoples of faith in other religious traditions have brought about changes in various aspects of life and worship of the community of Jesus. For example, the Eucharist is seen not only as reactualizing the Last Supper and Jesus' sacrifice, which the faithful share, but as a fore-taste of the Messianic Banquet to which all come. These celebrations carry the character of the table-fellowship of Jesus who ate

with the poor, the publicans and the sinners.

An ecclesiology that comprehends this experience will need to see these new emerging ecclesial communities as interacting partners with the historical churches, and both as signs to and on the way to the Kingdom.

The task ahead

In essence what we see as ecclesiological challenges to the Methodist Church in India, and with it to other churches as well, is an ecclesiology that is based on the Indian experience, but is in dialectical relationship with biblical models and ecclesial models drawn from the history of Christianity. In speaking of the 'Indian experience', we give prominence to the reflections that have gone on both in living with ecclesiologies that have been inherited from mother churches and in responding to the contexts in which we live as ecclesial communities of Jesus. Out of this experience of living and reflecting, there are emerging certain critiques, many still largely inchoate, for sifting what has been inherited. There are also being either worked out or discovered "new things", not always clearly articulated, for moving forward to a new self-understanding of the life, worship and witness of the church which is relevant in India. In one sense, therefore, the task ahead of us is to develop what is inchoate and articulate what is new.

United Theological College
Bangalore

David C. Scott

Foot Notes

- 1 James K. Mathews, *South of the Himalayas*. New York: Editorial Department of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1955. p.90
- 2 Albert C. Outler (ed.), *John Wesley*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1964. p.137
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.210.
- 4 The source of this evades the writer and hence the words are an approximation of the original rendered from a weak memory.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.10. 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. VI. New York: Harper & Bros., 1939. p.207.
- 8 Quoted in James K. Mathews, *South of the Himalayas*. p. 90.
- 9 M. E. Prabhakar, "Introduction", *Towards a Dalit Theology*, ed. M.E Prabhakar Delhi: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1988, p.4. 10 *The Book of Discipline*, p.14.,
Quoted in William Stewart, "The Renewal of the Church; in Unity"
Renewal for Mission, eds. David Lyon and Albert Manuel, 2nd rev.
and enlarged. Madras: C. L. S., 1968. p.51. 12 Matthew 20:25ff

Book Reviews

Patristic Heritage in the Renaissance and the Modern World, Francis Xavier Murphy C. SS. R., ed. Norman Shaifer & Marie F. Porter, Tappan, NY: Shepherd Press, 1990, pp. vii, 237, \$ 14.95

This is a collection of essays by Fr. Murphy published in honour of his seventieth birthday. Father Murphy became famous as Xavier Rynne through his series of *Letters from the Vatican City* describing the intrigues behind the Vatican II. He is a patristic scholar and he brings out the development of the theological ideas of the Fathers in very readable fashion.

"The influence of the early Fathers on modern society is immense but largely unrecognized", say the editors. Even today in some manner the world is feeling the influence of Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, Hilary and Rufinus. The merit of the Fathers is that they had an irenic and comprehensive vision of antiquity that brought the insights of Homer and Plato within the framework of the Christian message. For example Clement of Alexandria saw in the Homeric myth of Ulysses and the sailors fleeing from the enticements of the Sirenes an image of the Church in the ship, the crucified Christ in Ulysses tied to the mast, the Holy Spirit as wind, the Word as pilot and eternal life the port. This legitimate need of handing down of image and sacrament is the source of the present interest in patristics.

Father Murphy's essays cover a wide range of topics from the Fathers like the foundations of moral teaching in Tertullian, Rufinus, Hilary, Basil and others, the mysticism of Evagrius, the eschatological perspective of Origen and Chrysostom, and the revolutionary aspect of hope in the Fathers. The author also applies patristic wisdom to the modern age by discussing issues like sexual morality and the Christian responsibility regarding global survival. The book makes interesting reading.

Re-Imagining the Parish, Base Communities, Adulthood and Family Consciousness, Patrick J. Brennan, New York: Crossroad, 1990, pp. x, 151, \$ 14.95

This is a book that shows how liberation theology is affecting even a conservative church like that of the United States of America. Fr. Patrick Brennan, founder and president of the National Center for Evangelization and Renewal, and director of the Archdiocesan Office for Chicago Evangelization, is author of several other books including *The Evangelizing Parish*, *Spirituality for an Anxious Age*, *The Purple Rainbow: A Book About Hurl*. In the book under review he is re-imagining the church itself, and its works of evangelization, catechesis and ministry, under three main elements, the focus on small, intentional communities as the basic unit, an emphasis on adult education, and the development of a family consciousness in ministry taking into account the diversity of family styles today.

Endemic to church is conservatism. No one can belong to a church without realizing that neither individual goodwill nor a humane communal ideology are strong enough to prevent an institution from accumulating a creeperlike cladding of conservatism and insensitivity, which entwines itself around human beings and is transmitted from generation to generation. The Church appears an end in itself. 'Though we use the language of renewal, and speak the language of Vatican II, the vision of the church articulated in the Middle Ages still dominates. In it a caste system of ontologically special, unique males determine the direction of the universal body of the church. The bishop, representing the pontiff in local churches, is in effect cloned in parishes in the diocese.' (p. 10) No wonder the system is alienating! There is an implicit theory of revelation that God's self-manifestation comes largely through papal and conciliar pronouncements, i.e., the tradition of the church in a very confined sense. Its missiology is that this one medieval vision of the church should be spread through the world and that it will make us catholic, whole, one, universal. It has also a sacramentology that makes the male ordained priests the professionals who have the ontological power to change bread and wine, and not so much presiders with an evangelizing community nor overseers of many household churches coming together.

In contrast to this traditionalistic ecclesiology, the true *traditional* view of the church coming from the Gospels presented the risen cosmic Christ as the leader of the universal movement that is the church. The bishop of Rome serves a unitive, symbolic function for the church. Under the risen Christ, the one true leader, the church as a sacred relational bond of faith, exists as servant and instrument of something larger, the Kingdom of God.

Conversion itself is primarily a work of imagination, of the heart; reason comes only later. Conversion is the shifting of dominant images. This is why Christ of the Gospels provided dominant images to replace the old ones. The first Christians imagined themselves as the dawning of a new, final age of human kind. The "community" in traditionalistic thinking makes persons consumers, observers, anonymous to each other. The experience implied by the church in the traditional perspective requires *kerygma* (sharing the word), *leitourgia* (prayer and worship), *diakonia* (service, ministry), and *koinonia* (shared fellowship). These have to be first experienced in small Christian community before they can be proclaimed in the large church.

The book examines the new image of the parish community as it has recently evolved in Latin American countries and in the growing church of Africa. In several dioceses even in North America new models of the parish are evolving. The principal shift is from a purely business perspective that dominated the past, to an emphasis on leadership. From his own experience in small parish groups Fr. Brennan lists twenty leadership qualities. Good body language for communication, active listening, empathy and the ability to communicate it, a love of people, a desire to be helpful rather than to impress, and the ability to keep discussion going without confrontation are some of the qualities listed. The second part of the book concentrates on adult catechesis, an important task of the church at a time when there are great many non-active Christians.

The great merit of the book is that it shows how the new dynamic concepts can be integrated into existing structures changing only the attitudes of practitioners, without throwing out the baby along with the dirty water into the sink.

The Future of Liberation Theology, Essays in Honour of Gustavo Gutierrez, ed. Mac H. Ellis & Otto Maduro, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989 pp. xviii, 506

The book contains papers presented at a seminar held at Maryknoll during July and August of 1988 to honour Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez on his sixtieth birthday and also to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Medellin Conference which formally recognized liberation theology. Taking into consideration the twenty years of liberation theology the seminar inquired what its future is.

As Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns points out "one of the great merits of liberation theology was to call attention to the situation and to the cry of the poor as a new historical phenomenon". The irruption of the poor into society and the church is a new emerging subject. In fact the poor lead us to the core of the truth that sets us free (p. 10). William Boteler MM points out that liberation theology is not a new growth of Christian theological reflection but an outgrowth of long years of such reflection. It is only a recent concrete expression of the social teaching of the Church, her gift to civil societies. But the rich heritage of Catholic social teaching was often "the best kept secret!"

The importance of liberation theology today is that in many parts of the world, as Bishop Desmond M. Tutu of South Africa states, we "have the privilege of working in situations of injustice and oppression where God's children have their noses rubbed in the dust daily and where they have their God-given human dignity trodden callously under foot with a cynical disregard for their human rights" (p. 25). According to Frei Betto liberation theology is a bastard theology, not in a pejorative sense, but because it draws its lineage and inspiration from all parts of the world. But as Leonardo Boff points out its originality is in its actual relevance, reflecting on faith and doing theology of history, of human action, of social events, of politics and of transformation produced from the position of and in the interests of the oppressed (p. 39).

Several papers in the book analyzes Gutierrez's unique contribution in the development of liberation theology. Examining the logic of liberation theology in Latin America several speakers attempt to show how its approach is applicable in China, South Africa, Philippines and other countries. This book with more than fifty contributors from all parts of the world is a mine of ideas to show how the dynamism generated by liberation theology can continue to transform the world.

An Asian Theology of Liberation, Aloysius Pieris S. J., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 1988, pp. xv, 144

As Paul Knitter says in the preface to the book the two questions that shake the foundations of Christianity's self-image and its truth claims are the many poor and the many religions. The position taken by Fr. Pieris in the book is that the two questions have to be faced together in Asia, particularly in his native Sri Lanka: Christians cannot adequately address the problem of Asian poverty except in the context of dialogue with Asian religions, and that dialogue will not be authentic and successful unless it be based on a concern for the poor.

So the scholarly and mystico-ritual encounters among religions should not serve as a smoke screen to avoid the harsh realities of poverty, injustice and exploitation. Similarly Pieris thinks that Latin American liberation theologians have been too much influenced by Karl Marx, whose dialectical materialism failed to see that there is revolution in religion, and by Karl Barth whose dialectical theology failed to see that there is revelation in religion. Owing to the narrow view of liberation theologians regarding other religions they have been unwittingly keeping the Asian religions in Western bondage. Even Karl Rahner's characterization of followers of other religions as anonymous Christians, contains according to Pieris a "crypto-colonialist theology of religions".

What is important for facing the dual question of poverty and religious pluralism from a single perspective is that Asian Christian churches should become truly Asian. This can be done only through an authentic, deep-reaching process of inculturation. But Western Christianity has not become so far Asian paradoxically because of the excessive, but mis-directed stress on inculturation, which only distracts the churches from the "colossal scandal of institutionalized misery that poses a challenge to every religion".

Of the various models of religiousness in the third world like African religiousness, Asian Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism there is only a very small minority that regard the one ultimate reality as a personal being. So "theology as God-talk or God's talk is not necessarily the universally valid starting point, or the direct object, or the only basis, of interreligious collaboration in the Third World" (p. 107). Pieris's suggestion is "that the religious instinct should be defined as a revolutionary urge, a psycho-social impulse, to generate a new humanity". Actually inculturation itself has come to mean in the present usage, the Christian search for meaning within the religious ethos of non-Christian cultures. In this context the key words of the Christian kerygma, kingdom, conversion and

witnessing have to find new meaning. Theology itself should be the explicitation of the theopraxis of the "little churches" of Asia that have appropriated the revolutionary religiousness of the Third World.

Pieris's critical evaluation of liberation theology in the context of Asian religious pluralism opens new avenues for a truly Asian theologizing.

J. B. Chethimattam

Contributors

K. M. George: A Priest and theologian of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, currently on the staff of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Bossey, near Geneva.

M. V. Abraham is a Priest of the Mar Thoma Church, currently Professor of New Testament and Director of Post-Graduate Studies at the United Theological College, Bangalore.

Pritam B. Santram: Formerly the General Secretary of the Synod of the Church of North India and currently the Bishop of Delhi.

P. B. Thomas: A Pastor of the Pentecostal Church with a Masters Degree in Theology from the United Theological College, Bangalore, currently teaching at the Faith Theological Seminary, Manakala, Kerala.

David C. Scott: A Pastor and theologian of the Methodist Church in India, currently Professor of Theology at the United Theological College, Bangalore.